THE GREAT COURSES®

Great Minds of the Western Intellectual Tradition, 3rd Edition

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There is a temptation, when surveying the history of Western thought, to imagine it as a succession of great names arranged in chronological order. One begins with the Greeks, proceeds through Christianity and the Middle Ages, encounters the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, passes through the ideological conflicts of the nineteenth century, and arrives at the intellectual fragmentation of the modern world. The result can resemble a museum tour, a sequence of famous figures and influential books displayed behind glass, admired for their historical significance but disconnected from the concerns of contemporary life.

This course invites a different perspective.

The history of ideas is not primarily a history of doctrines. It is a history of questions. Philosophers, theologians, scientists, political theorists, economists, and social critics may disagree profoundly with one another, yet they often participate in a common conversation extending across centuries. The participants change. The vocabulary evolves. Historical circumstances transform the context. But the deepest questions persist. What is ultimately real? How can human beings know the truth? What makes a life good? What is justice? Does history possess meaning? Is there a God? What can reason accomplish? What are the limits of freedom? How should human beings live together?

These questions are older than any civilization now existing, and they remain as urgent today as when they were first posed.

The eighty-four lectures that comprise *Great Minds of the Western Intellectual Tradition* follow the evolution of this conversation across more than two and a half millennia. The course begins with the earliest Greek philosophers, whose bold attempts to understand

nature through reason rather than myth established many of the assumptions underlying Western inquiry. It concludes with contemporary debates concerning language, science, tradition, liberalism, ideology, and the future of modernity. Between these points lies one of humanity's most remarkable intellectual journeys.

The story begins in the ancient Mediterranean world. The Pre-Socratics ask what the universe is made of. The Sophists challenge assumptions about truth and justice. Socrates turns philosophical attention toward the examined life. Plato explores the nature of reality, knowledge, and political order. Aristotle develops comprehensive frameworks for understanding ethics, politics, logic, and the natural world. The Hellenistic schools confront the problem of human happiness in an uncertain world. By the end of antiquity, the foundations of Western philosophy have been laid.

Yet the classical tradition is only one of the two great sources from which Western civilization emerges.

Alongside Athens stands Jerusalem.

The biblical tradition introduces a radically different intellectual orientation. Instead of beginning with philosophical speculation, it begins with revelation, covenant, history, and faith. The God of the Hebrew scriptures is not an abstract principle but an active presence who enters into relationships, makes promises, judges actions, and guides historical events. The encounter between the classical and biblical traditions becomes one of the defining events in the history of ideas. The Christian Age witnesses the gradual synthesis of Greek philosophy and Christian theology through thinkers such as Augustine, Aquinas, and countless others who sought to reconcile faith and reason within a unified vision of reality.

For nearly a thousand years, this synthesis provided the intellectual framework of Western civilization.

Yet no intellectual framework remains unchallenged indefinitely.

The Renaissance reopens the classical inheritance and encourages a renewed confidence in human creativity and inquiry. The Reformation fractures religious unity and transforms conceptions of authority. The scientific revolution alters humanity's understanding of nature. New methods of observation, mathematics, and experimentation reveal a universe governed by discoverable laws rather than inherited assumptions.

The result is the emergence of the modern world.

Thinkers such as Bacon, Descartes, Hobbes, Locke, Spinoza, and Leibniz attempt to reconstruct knowledge upon new foundations. Their efforts culminate in the Enlightenment, an age animated by extraordinary confidence in the power of reason. If human beings can understand nature, perhaps they can also improve society. If inquiry can free us from ignorance, perhaps it can also free us from oppression. The Enlightenment becomes one of the most influential intellectual movements in history, shaping modern conceptions of science, politics, rights, education, and progress.

Yet every intellectual triumph generates new problems.

The nineteenth century inherits the achievements of the Enlightenment while confronting realities that challenge its optimism. Industrialization transforms economies and societies. Nationalism reshapes political identities. Secularization alters the cultural landscape. Philosophers respond by constructing vast ideological systems intended to explain history and human destiny. Hegel, Marx, Comte, Kierkegaard, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche offer competing visions of modernity, each attempting to make sense of a world undergoing unprecedented change.

The twentieth century, in turn, subjects those visions to scrutiny.

Psychoanalysis reveals hidden dimensions of the self. Phenomenology investigates consciousness. Existentialism confronts freedom and meaning. Analytic philosophy examines language and logic. New approaches emerge from the recognition that certainty is more elusive than previous generations believed. At the same time, world wars, totalitarian movements, technological revolutions, and social transformations force intellectuals to reconsider the assumptions underlying modern civilization itself.

The final part of the course examines these crises of modernity. The debate is no longer simply about what is true but about how human beings can sustain meaningful forms of knowledge, morality, freedom, and political order in a world increasingly aware of its own complexity and contingency. Contemporary thinkers confront questions that would have been recognizable to Plato, Augustine, and Kant, yet they do so under historical conditions those earlier figures could scarcely have imagined.

This continuity is one of the central themes of the course.

The history of Western thought is not a sequence of disconnected eras. Each generation inherits questions from its predecessors, modifies them, challenges them, and passes them forward. Plato remains present in Augustine. Aristotle reappears in Aquinas. The debates of the Reformation influence the Enlightenment. Nietzsche shadows much of twentieth-century thought. Ideas rarely disappear. More often, they are transformed.

The purpose of studying this tradition is not merely historical. These lectures do not ask us to memorize doctrines or revere intellectual authorities. They invite us to participate in an ongoing conversation. The thinkers we encounter are not relics of the past. They are interlocutors. Their questions remain our questions because the fundamental problems of human existence have not vanished.

We still wonder about truth and meaning.

We still struggle to reconcile freedom and order.

We still debate the relationship between faith and reason.

We still ask what justice requires.

We still seek happiness, knowledge, purpose, and wisdom.

The Western intellectual tradition offers no final answer to these questions. Indeed, one of its greatest lessons may be that final answers are rarely available. What it does offer is something more enduring: a record of humanity's most sustained effort to understand itself and its world through disciplined reflection.

That effort begins with wonder.

It continues through disagreement, criticism, revision, and discovery.

And it remains unfinished.

The journey that follows is therefore not merely an exploration of the past. It is an invitation to join one of the longest and most consequential conversations in human history.

Part I: Classical Origins

Preamble

There is a particular kind of intellectual courage required to ask a question you cannot answer — to sit with uncertainty and treat it not as a failure of nerve but as the very beginning of wisdom. That courage is the common thread running through the twelve lectures that make up this opening part of *Great Minds of the Western Intellectual Tradition*. From the bold, sometimes reckless speculations of the earliest Greek thinkers to the disciplined skepticism of a Roman physician writing at the edge of a dissolving empire, Part I traces the long and restless arc of classical philosophy in its first and foundational flowering. It is a journey that begins, appropriately enough, with the question of what a journey through philosophy even is.

The introductory lecture wastes no time in confronting that question directly. Philosophy, we are told, may be understood in at least three ways: as the rational pursuit of perennial truths, as an historical discipline whose questions and methods shift from era to era, and as something older and more irreducible than either of those descriptions — the love of wisdom, born of contemplative wonder. This triple characterization is not merely an academic throat-clearing. It is a genuinely useful compass. As the lectures unfold across seven parts and eighty-four installments, the listener will find that sometimes philosophy looks like a rigorous scientific program, sometimes like a political manifesto, sometimes like a spiritual autobiography, and sometimes like all three at once. Part I introduces the full range of what philosophy can be by letting the ancient world demonstrate it in practice.

The story begins not in Athens but along the trade-soaked coastline of Ionia, in cities like Miletus where the convergence of cultures made received mythology feel insufficient. The Pre-Socratics — Thales, Anaximander, Anaximenes, Pythagoras, Heraclitus, Parmenides, and Zeno — were the first thinkers in the Western record to redirect the fundamental questions of existence away from divine agency and toward material and logical explanation. What is the world made of? How does change happen? Is motion even real? These are questions that modern readers may associate with physics textbooks, but the Pre-Socratics pursued them with an almost religious intensity, and the tension between reason and revelation that they first opened up has never fully closed. Pythagoras, in particular, reminds us that the line between mathematics, mysticism, and music was once a great deal thinner than we tend to assume. His conviction that numbers undergird the cosmos is not merely a historical curiosity; it is a founding intuition of modern science, one that Galileo would invoke two millennia later when he declared mathematics the language of the universe.

The Sophists arrive next, and they arrive as something of a provocation. The very word has been used as an insult for so long that it takes a deliberate act of historical generosity to restore them to their proper dignity. They were, in their time, the world's first professional intellectuals — teachers of rhetoric, political analysis, and the close examination of human custom and law. Their great contribution, which Plato resented precisely because he recognized its power, was the discovery that most of what human beings call justice, morality, and natural law is in fact convention, constructed rather than given, variable rather than eternal. The Melian Dialogue, as Thucydides records it, is the Sophists' most chilling exhibit: Athenian generals informing a small neutral island that justice is simply the will of the stronger, and that nature has always been so. This is uncomfortable reading. It was meant to be.

Plato's three lectures occupy the gravitational center of Part I, and rightly so. His response to the Sophists — and to Socrates' execution at the hands of a democratic state — was not merely philosophical but almost theological in its intensity. The theory of Forms posits that behind the changing, unreliable world of appearances there exists a realm of unchanging truth accessible only to the mind's eye. The allegory of the cave gives that doctrine an unforgettable mythic shape: most of us live chained in darkness, watching shadows on a wall and mistaking them for reality. Education, in Plato's vision, is the painful process of turning around and climbing toward the light. His political philosophy in the Republic follows directly from this metaphysics: if truth is knowable, then those who know it should rule. The philosopher-king is not an arrogant fantasy but the logical conclusion of Plato's deepest premises. His psychology adds a third dimension, dividing the soul into rational, spirited, and appetitive parts whose proper ordering mirrors the ideal ordering of the just city. What makes Plato so inexhaustible — and why one philosopher called all of Western thought a series of footnotes to him — is that his reach is total. He addresses being, knowledge, beauty, love, justice, death, and the nature of the self, and he addresses them all together, as parts of a single, interlocking vision.

Aristotle is, in a sense, Plato's greatest gift to posterity, and also his greatest critic. His three lectures here cover metaphysics, politics, and ethics. Where Plato pointed upward toward eternal forms, Aristotle pointed outward at the world of growing, changing, purposeful things. His four causes, his doctrine of potentiality and actuality, his insistence that form is always embodied in matter — these are the tools of a man who wanted philosophy to account for oak trees and animals and human cities, not just for abstract triangles in a realm beyond the sky. His ethics of virtue as a mean, of happiness as the activity of the rational soul in accordance with excellence, and of friendship as essential to the good life, remains among the most

livable moral philosophies ever articulated. His politics, with its advocacy for a broad middle class and its suspicion of concentrated power, anticipates concerns that will echo through every subsequent century.

The final three lectures of Part I step out of Athens and into the wider Greco-Roman world, where philosophy meets the demands of empire, civil war, and personal survival. Epicureanism and Stoicism both emerge as responses to a world in which the city-state no longer offers protection or meaning, and in which the individual must construct a private ethics adequate to a very large and indifferent universe. Cicero's eclectic synthesis — blending Stoic duty, Epicurean pleasure, and Aristotelian political realism — represents Rome's most generous intellectual achievement, a philosophy built not for the schoolroom but for the active life of a statesman who knew that certainty was rare and that the best one could do was choose wisely among imperfect options. And Sextus Empiricus, writing at the far edge of this tradition, asks the question that every previous thinker had tried to suppress: what if we simply cannot know? His answer — that we should trust experience, conform to custom, suspend judgment, and keep inquiring anyway — is not the counsel of despair. It is, in its own quiet way, a form of courage.

Part I, then, is not merely a survey of ancient philosophy. It is an initiation into a conversation that has never stopped, conducted by minds whose questions remain, two and a half millennia later, stubbornly, beautifully unresolved.

Lecture 1: Introduction

Professor Darren Staloff

What is Philosophy?

In this lecture, we seek to set the parameters and framework for the birth of philosophy in the ancient world — first among those pioneers of ancient Greek philosophy, the pre-Socratics, then among the famed classical Greek thinkers Socrates, his student Plato, and Plato's student Aristotle, and then in the Hellenistic and Roman period, a period characterized by syncretism.

But first, it is probably useful to ask a straightforward question: what is philosophy? What do we mean by philosophy? What kind of a discipline is this?

Philosophy can be characterized in a number of different ways. We can describe it as the rational pursuit of truths — truths conceived as answers to perennial and eternal questions. This is one way of thinking about the various sub-disciplines of philosophy. Metaphysics, or ontology, is the study of being, or the ultimate nature and structure of the universe: what is out there, and how does it relate to everything else? Ethics is the study of the nature of the good life and the nature of the good itself, of value. It is obviously closely associated with political philosophy, which examines the nature of political life and seeks to characterize such public virtues as justice, equality, and fraternity. Aesthetics examines the nature of the beautiful and its embodiment both in nature and in works of art. Epistemology examines the question of knowledge — we might think of it as the theory of knowledge — and specifically attempts to characterize the nature of truth, science, and rational inquiry, while endeavoring to offer criteria for each. Philosophy of mind, or

philosophical psychology, is the study of the workings of the *psychē*, the soul or the mind, analyzing its functions and mechanisms. And natural philosophy attempts to offer a rational account of the natural world, both organic and inorganic, again with an eye toward rational explanation.

But that is only one way of thinking about philosophy. We could also describe philosophy as a historical discipline. As such, it would be subject to change over time, which means that different epochs are concerned with rather different issues. Post-Platonic philosophy, for example, was concerned with metaphysical and ethical issues — those were really the core of its concentration and focus. Early Christian philosophy was interested in theology and metaphysics: the relationship of the divine to the human and God's working out of his providential plan in time and space. Modern philosophy, by contrast, has been concerned far more with epistemological issues — questions about the nature of science, truth, and rational inquiry — as well as with political considerations, as publics have emerged to become important political forces.

On yet another level, we might observe that philosophical questions which prove tractable give us a very interesting insight into the history of the discipline. Once such problems prove tractable, amenable to fairly straightforward solutions, they often cease to remain philosophical. The natural philosophers Galileo and Newton, for example, were so successful in their endeavors that the subject they created became a separate discipline — the one we know as physics, and in particular mechanics. Similarly, the political speculations of many post-Machiavellian theorists laid the groundwork for the new disciplines of political science, sociology, and even economics. And the phenomenological analyses of post-Humean philosophers — that is, philosophers who examined the phenomenological or immediate experience we have in our mental

life — gave rise to the modern discipline of experimental psychology. The principle of association and the notion of stimulus and response, which form the very core of modern experimental and behavioral psychology, all trace their lineage back to philosophy, just as existentialism and the philosophy of mind combined to give birth to modern psychoanalysis.

One might therefore think of philosophy as the historical study of intractable problems, such that as problems become tractable they cease to be philosophical. This requires us to be aware that different epochs not only concern themselves with different issues, but frame those issues differently. In the ancient world, for instance, metaphysics was organized around the issue of hylomorphism — the relation of form or structure to content or matter — and that question dominated the thought of both Plato and Aristotle. Christian metaphysics, by contrast, was organized around the relation between the fallen world of man and the realm of the divine, giving rise to a very different way of framing the same fundamental questions about what exists and what the universe is made of. Modern metaphysics, in turn, has been organized around dualisms — the dualism of mind and body, and most importantly the dualism of the empirical and mechanistic versus the ideal or super-sensible.

We might similarly note that the mind of the ancient Greeks — *nous*, as it were — was characterized by its participation in universal concepts. What made something a mind was its ability to grasp universals. This stands in stark contrast to our post-Cartesian understanding of mind, which is not defined by its ability to apprehend universals and universal concepts but rather by its experience of particular phenomenological states — immediate feelings which are never universal but are always particular and individual to the person who has them. States like pain, doubt, or pleasure are unique and in some sense ineffable, because each

person has exclusively privileged access to their own phenomenological states. So even a topic like the philosophy of mind changes dramatically over time as people think about mind in fundamentally different ways. Plato's mind was not only subject to universals but was itself universal; one could speak of nature as having *nous* or mind. One cannot do that within the phenomenological framework of Descartes.

The political philosophy of both Plato and Aristotle similarly presupposed that political association was natural for man. Man is a *zoon politikon*, a political animal. That was an essential part of human nature; one would never find men outside of political associations. Contrast that with modern social theorists such as Hobbes or Locke, who assume instead that the natural state of man — the so-called state of nature — is an isolated one in which each individual lives on his own prior to political association, and that the motivations of such individuals are always self-interested rather than directed toward the good of the *polis* as a whole.

This also means that philosophy and its practitioners occupy different cultural and social roles in different epochs, which is, I think, very important. Socrates and Plato, for example, were both social and cultural critics who took an extremely adversarial stance toward the cultural and political authorities of their time. Both rejected the teachings of religious authority — principally that of Homer — and also criticized the existing democratic practices of Athens. Medieval philosophers, by contrast, generally found themselves in the employ of the Church. They were generally churchmen or university professors teaching at universities associated with the Church, and as a result philosophy was conceived to be, in the words of Aquinas, the handmaid of theology. Both philosophy and the philosopher thus occupied a very different social role than in the ancient world. In modern philosophy, we find again that philosophers tend to be

critical — offering critiques of society, or trying to serve as cultural referees who judge the veracity, tenability, and legitimacy of various discourses and disciplines by deploying criteria of truth and rationality to assess the various arts, humanities, and sciences.

But — and here I think is the third way we must think about philosophy — philosophy is also certainly what its very name implies: to translate from the Greek, the love of wisdom. In this sense, philosophy is ultimately born of contemplative wonder and a sense of awe toward the nature of being and the universe. As such, philosophy both expresses a posture toward being, a sort of metaphysical stance, and seeks to fulfill both spiritual and existential needs, as well as purely rational and explanatory roles. Ancient philosophy thus begins with a combination of rational curiosity and reverence — the same combination found in its precursors, the famed gymnosophists of the ancient subcontinent, the naked forest speculators whom we call yogis to this day, and whom many scholars have argued were in fact precursors to Socrates.

The Pre-Socratics: The World of Objects

Let us turn now to the first epoch in the birth of philosophy in the ancient and classical world — that of the pre-Socratics — who truly represent the birth of Western philosophical speculation, a speculation that began in the wider Greek diaspora.

The first phase of pre-Socratic thought was devoted to understanding the world of nature — the natural world, what we might describe as the world of objects. The Ionians, for example, sought to understand the natural world by reducing its multiplicity to a finite number of entities, beginning with the four classic Greek elements — earth, water, air, and fire — and then attempting to reduce even those to still simpler entities: Thales with water,

Anaximander with the unlimited, and Anaximenes with air. They thus sought to answer a fundamental metaphysical question: what is the universe made of? What exactly is out there?

In contrast, the Pythagoreans sought to reduce the same material realities to a simpler scheme, but in their case the scheme consisted of mathematical objects. That reduction of material objects to mathematical entities highlighted the ways in which mathematics helps us model our experience of the natural world. It is, of course, not coincidental that philosophy begins this rigorous mode of rational discourse in a culture which had mastered deductive mathematics, both in Euclidean geometry and in the work of Pythagoras himself.

Heraclitus and Parmenides — the great opponents on the metaphysics of the post-Pythagorean epoch — addressed not the question of what the universe is made of, but rather the question of change and continuity. How does change occur? Is change even possible? In approaching these questions in an abstract and logical way, it was really they who helped give rise to metaphysics as a logical discipline, a discipline grounded in abstract reasoning. Both the dynamism of Heraclitus and the monism of the Eleatics would have far-reaching influences on subsequent thinkers across the centuries. Nietzsche, for example, drew heavily on Heraclitus for philosophical inspiration, deeply moved by Heraclitus' sense of flux, chaos, and strife in the universe. There are also very deep and obvious affinities between the monistic cosmology of Parmenides and the monistic determinism of Baruch Spinoza in the seventeenth century.

The Pre-Socratics: The World of Subjects

The second phase of pre-Socratic thought turned from the analysis of the world of objects, or nature, to the study of the human world — the world of subjects. This shift was in part the result of the profusion of doctrines about nature, each of which was equally persuasive and each of which contradicted the others. Such a profusion of equally persuasive but mutually contradictory doctrines tends to produce skepticism, and that skepticism about the possibility of reliable knowledge of nature caused thinkers to redirect their inquiry toward the human and social world.

Now, both Heraclitus and the Pythagoreans had in fact offered ethical doctrines, though of a radically different character. But the truly critical figures here are the Sophists, because the Sophists represent the first full-blown engagement with the problems of politics, ethics, and human sociability. Their analysis was empirical — they studied constitutions and examined political practices in a realistic fashion — and their empirical analyses of political motivation and power formed the basis for subsequent political science as well as subsequent political philosophy. Particularly important was their discovery of the role of convention and custom, as opposed to regular mathematical law, in human affairs. This finally forced serious thinkers to recognize that many of our political and social values are, in fact, culturally determined and conventional — varying from place to place and time to time.

The Classical Greek Philosophers

This brings us to the high point of the ancient world: the development of the great classical Greek philosophers — Socrates, his student Plato, and Plato's student Aristotle — all of whom lived or taught in Athens, and all of whom drew heavily on the pre-

Socratic traditions, as well as on each other's teachings, to construct what are really the first full-blown philosophical systems, particularly in the thought of Plato and Aristotle.

Socrates

Socrates' great breakthrough and most important contribution was the development of ethical rationalism — the belief that people act on the basis of what they think is good. On this view, there is no perversion of the will, which means that immoral action is the result of a failure of knowledge rather than a failure of character. Socrates also taught that ethical knowledge was teachable.

The Sophists had maintained that morality and political order were based on convention, and were therefore obviously relative to those conventions. Socrates rejected these skeptical conclusions. He insisted instead that ethical truths were absolute and demonstrable, and his model for this was geometry: through carefully defining ethical terms and grasping their essence, we could arrive at final and fixed moral truths. And as mentioned, Socrates held that these truths were not only rational but teachable — a doctrine with profound implications for the role of the philosopher. If one can teach virtue, and if the only thing preventing virtuous behavior is a lack of knowledge, then the philosopher, as ethical teacher, takes on a critical and indeed primary role within the *polis* as instructor and censor of politics and morals.

Socrates further taught that all people act on the basis of their beliefs, and thus that the problem of morality is really a problem of knowledge, not of will — a position quite antithetical to the later Christian tradition. This was summed up in his famous expression: to know the good is to do the good. This made ethical philosophy the *sine qua non* of a just and stable social and political order, and

placed philosophy at the very center of Athenian cultural life, at least in philosophy's own self-understanding.

Plato

Plato injected his teacher's ethical rationalism into a remarkable overarching philosophical synthesis. Plato's metaphysics were designed to address the problem of change raised by Heraclitus and the Eleatics, and his doctrine of forms, essences, or ideas was clearly intended to divide natural objects into, on the one hand, their structure or essential nature — what he called the form — and on the other hand their material content. This helped resolve the problem of change, because the forms were definable and therefore eternal and unchangeable, whereas it was the material content of things that was subject to change.

For Plato, this also had profound epistemological implications. Precisely because the forms were definable and eternal, they were the subjects — indeed the only proper subjects — of rational knowledge. Changes arising from the material principle, by contrast, cannot be reduced to abstract definable terms, and therefore, Plato argues, we can never have a truly scientific understanding of change in the physical world. Plato used this dualism of form and content to argue further that the forms of things were in some sense metaphysically distinct from and prior to the material objects that participated in them. Although all the objects we encounter are a mixture of form and matter, the forms actually exist independently in some metaphysical realm and possess greater reality — because they are more knowable and eternal — than the particular things that participate in them. In this way, Plato offered the first full-blown dualist ontology: the view that beyond our own realm of sense and appearance, there exists another realm, another world of eternal and unchanging truth.

Plato's ethical and political doctrines were informed by his adoption of Socratic ethical rationalism. Since for Plato politics is simply ethics writ large — summed up in that wonderful formulation in the *Republic* — Plato assumes that philosophy or rational inquiry is capable of generating the same kind of absolute certainty for the *polis* that it can generate for the ethical life of the individual. This means that Plato's political thought is not only descriptive, as had been the case with the Sophists, but prescriptive: it holds out a model or blueprint which we are ethically obliged to try to bring to realization. And it is that prescriptive understanding of political philosophy that would become the source for much of the subsequent idealist tradition in political speculation.

If we look at the *Republic* in particular, we find doctrines with a long legacy in that idealist tradition. Plato was the first to critique private property as a source of social injustice — a form of communism in the original sense. He was the first to argue for the equality of women insofar as they participate in mathematical rationality — an early feminism. And he argued, ultimately, for the rule of philosophers within the state and the culture.

Plato's psychology drew on his metaphysics in being again based on a dualism of soul — or form — and body, or material content. But Plato further analyzed the *psychē* into three distinct faculties or functions: the rational or calculative part of our minds, which engages in mathematical analysis; the spirited part, associated with courage and our sense of ego; and the appetitive part, that which desires. Each of these corresponds to a different social class in the *Republic*, and the Platonic ideal is one in which a healthy soul is governed by the rational faculty, with the aid of the spirited or ego-bearing will, over the base animal appetites. This scheme would have a very long history indeed. One might think of the Christian notion of each soul being tempted by demonic urges corresponding to Plato's

appetitive part, or guided by angels corresponding to the intellective and moral part. One might equally compare it to Freud's tripartite analysis of the mind into a superego — much like Plato's intellective part — an ego corresponding to the spirited part, and the id corresponding to the appetitive or libidinous part.

Aristotle

Plato's student Aristotle adopted the overall approach of his mentor but criticized some of his central doctrines on what we would call realistic grounds. Aristotle rejected the metaphysical separation of form and content, arguing that forms exist only in their participation in actual things — that objects, though admittedly composed of form and content, do not license the inference that there exists a separate world of forms themselves. Aristotle resolved the problem of change not through Platonic hylomorphism but through his own doctrine of entelechy, which held that natural objects have natural ends or potentials toward which they tend unless interrupted. The acorn under the right conditions becomes the oak; the child under the right conditions becomes the adult. Even inanimate objects tend to rest unless moved, and all objects tend toward their natural level.

Aristotle further posited a fourfold causal nexus — formal, material, efficient, and final causes, which will be explored in subsequent lectures — that would have an immense impact on European thought all the way to the scientific revolution. It was an analysis that synthesized metaphysics with the science of his day, and Aristotle was quite a scientist. For him, the soul is the final cause of motion in organic matter — it is the entelechy of the person. He identified four forms of souls, the ultimate form of which is the pure actuality of God, the prime mover, who sits atop the chain of being.

Aristotle also criticized the conclusions of Plato's political and ethical philosophy, again on realistic grounds. He rejected the communal

arrangements of his teacher as impractical and offered instead an empirical account of the various forms of states and the factors — social and economic — that determine them, rather than what he considered an illusory quest for one single best and true form of government. Rather than rule by philosopher-kings, Aristotle inclined toward the republican rule of a broad middle class. In many ways, Aristotle as the great realist is the founder of modern realistic political thought, as well as of the realistic tradition in practical metaphysics and epistemology.

Finally, Aristotle also held that justice and virtue are not pure sciences mathematically demonstrable in the way Socrates and Plato had taught, but are rather the result of practical judgment, or *phronesis*. One learns the truth of political association and how to live one's life well not through abstract reasoning, but through practical life and through learning from experience.

The Hellenistic and Roman Epochs

The final epoch — that of the Hellenistic and Roman worlds — inherited these classical doctrines and incorporated them into its own philosophical perspectives. Many historians have noted that this epoch produces relatively little in the way of original systematic philosophical speculation. What the late Hellenistic and Roman thinkers did instead was draw on classical philosophy in a syncretic fashion, weaving together as many different strands as possible to create syntheses that would help them navigate their cultural worlds.

The Stoics and Epicureans, for example, tried to give meaning and direction to ethical and spiritual life without recourse to traditional mythologies. Both attempted to provide rational models of the good life — ones that did not depend on religious beliefs. The Stoic ideal of a life lived according to nature, drawing on Socratic teachings,

projected a rational order on the cosmos and demanded of its adherents both reverential piety and the self-discipline of a life lived by the dictates of reason. The Epicureans, by contrast, sought the good life in the Aristotelian pursuit of cultivated pleasures — not, it must be stressed, the pursuit of crude carnal hedonism, but rather pleasures of the mind, pleasures that produce intellectual satisfaction. A very Aristotelian doctrine, in fact.

Similarly, thinkers like Cicero and Polybius practiced a philosophical eclecticism, selectively drawing on elements of different philosophies to construct their own unique worldviews. Cicero, for example, combined Socratic and Stoic conceptions of virtue and duty with Aristotelian political philosophy — that practical, realistic analysis of existing regimes — to produce a political credo for late Republican Rome.

Skepticism emerged in the Hellenistic and Roman period as a result of the profusion of metaphysical and philosophical doctrines that had accumulated by that time. Skepticism led to a return to the quest for merely practical certainty, as we see in figures like Sextus Empiricus. But it also led to an openness to extra-rational sources of cosmology and metaphysics — to an openness to more traditional, perhaps more faith-based and emotionally grounded understandings of the world, and to participation in meaningful spiritual existence. This is reflected in the epoch by the rise of mystery cults, of which Mithraism was one of the most famous, though ultimately the most successful, of course, was Christianity.

In a sense, the rise of skepticism brings the trajectory of ancient philosophy full circle. Ancient philosophy began with a kind of skepticism: the Milesian Ionians engaged in philosophical disputation and the construction of a science of nature partly because they had been subjected to a variety of different religious interpretations of the world, which led them to be skeptical of those religious

interpretations. The subsequent profusion of metaphysical and rational philosophical doctrines produced, in turn, a skepticism about rational disputation itself. And what we find is that the skepticism of classical philosophies — which were themselves intended to resolve the first, religiously-induced skepticism — gives way to a new age of faith: the Christian epoch.

Lecture 2: The Pre-Socratics — Physics and Metaphysics

Professor Louis Markos

Introduction: The Birth of Philosophy

In this lecture, we shall witness the exciting birth of philosophy in the speculations and systems of the pre-Socratics. We shall explore how these philosophical forerunners shifted the focus of learned thought from religious questions of *who* and *why* to scientific questions of *what* and *how*, and, by so doing, kicked off an ongoing dialogue that still continues 2,500 years later.

Now, we call them the pre-Socratics for two reasons. The first is chronological: they precede Socrates. But the second, more important reason is that the pre-Socratics — and there are about a dozen of them — laid down a philosophical framework that Socrates, and later Plato and Aristotle, both developed and countered.

When did the pre-Socratics live? They cover a span of about 150 years, from roughly 600 BC to about 450 BC. Where did they live? Unlike Socrates, who lived in Athens, the pre-Socratics hailed first from the Ionian, or Asia Minor, coast — what is today the western coast of Turkey — and some of the later pre-Socratics came from the eastern coast of Italy and the island of Sicily. This geographical aspect is vital, I believe, because it places the pre-Socratics along major trade routes and thus exposed them to a plethora of foreign ideas and cults. This was particularly true of the founders of pre-Socratic thought: Thales, Anaximander, and Anaximenes, all of whom lived in the Ionian city of Miletus, and who are therefore called the Milesians. Perhaps growing up in the bustling markets of Miletus, where every conceivable religious system was advocated, inspired

these three men to come up with ideas and answers that were more pluralistic and less tied to cultural norms. They lived in a place fertile with new ideas, and I think that inspired them to move beyond tradition and to explore genuinely new possibilities.

From *Who* and *Why* to *What* and *How*

To guide their new search, Thales, Anaximander, and Anaximenes formulated a new set of questions. Prior to the pre-Socratics, in the eighth and seventh centuries BC, Greek poets like Hesiod — who lived around 700 BC — attempted to account for the present state of man and nature by tracing the origins and actions of the gods. In his great work the *Theogony*, which means the birth or origin of the gods, Hesiod presents himself as called by the Muses to explain two things: first, why things are as they are, and second, by what divine agency — or *who* — these things came into being. In other words, Hesiod is interested in religious questions and supernatural answers.

Along came the Milesians — Thales, Anaximander, and Anaximenes — and they rejected Hesiod's supernatural religious orientation, with its questions of *why* and *who*, in favor of a more naturalistic, scientific approach. The Greek word for nature is *physis*, and we therefore call these men *physisists*, or physicists, because they were interested in natural, physical, material explanations. Their interest was not in who created the world, but in what the universe was made of. Not in supernatural religious answers, but in material, physical questions — not *who*, but *what*. Likewise, they were interested not in *why*, but in *how* things come into being and pass away. They were not looking for philosophical or religious purpose; they were looking for material, physical processes.

At first, you might think I am saying that the pre-Socratics were anti-religious or atheistic. Not necessarily. It is not so much that they were

anti-religious as that the gods played no significant role in their materialistic systems. The Bible begins with the words *in the beginning, God*. For the pre-Socratics, by contrast, the origin of all life is not God, but *stuff*, or matter — which means that even if the gods do exist, the gods, too, are products of this stuff, this primal matter. In this sense, one might argue that the pre-Socratics were the true founders of the modern spirit of evolutionary inquiry: they were looking for physical, material answers to the questions of what we are and what this earth is made of, and they were doing this 2,500 years ago.

The Four Elements and Qualitative Pairs

All the pre-Socratics shared a common belief that the material building blocks of life are composed of and expressed through four elements — earth, air, water, and fire. Today we know that none of those are elements in the modern chemical sense, but the Greeks considered them the four fundamental elements, and they believed that everything in the universe is composed of some combination of these four.

In addition to the four elements, the Greeks posited a series of qualitative pairs — pairs of opposing qualities — including hot and cold, dry and moist, rare and dense, and light and dark, among many others. They believed not only that everything was formed from these elements, but that everything could be described as either hot or cold, dry or moist. To give a feel for how the pre-Socratics imagined the world, consider how they mixed together the elements with their qualitative pairs. They conceived of the universe as composed of four levels: the bottom-most level of earth, which is cold and dry; above that a layer of water, which is cold and moist; then a layer of air, which is moist and hot; and finally, the uppermost

level of fire, which is hot and dry. That picture gives a useful sense of how the pre-Socratics understood the structure of the world when they turned their scientific minds toward it.

The Milesians

Both the Milesians and Pythagoras sought to posit a *first principle* — a single originary substance that could account for the cosmos. The Greek word for this first principle is *archē* — as in *archaeology*, meaning beginning or origin. Many of the early pre-Socratics wanted to find a single physical origin, a first principle that could be the beginning of everything.

Thales

The first person to do so was Thales, and for that reason any book on the history of Western science or Western philosophy will always begin with him. It is worth noting that for the pre-Socratics, science, philosophy, and religion are essentially the same thing; it is not until Aristotle that we begin separating those three domains.

Thales was a keen observer of the natural world. He accurately foretold a solar eclipse in 585 BC, he measured the Egyptian pyramids, and he cornered the market on olive presses by predicting a large olive crop. An astonishing man, he was considered one of the Seven Sages of the ancient world. Thales was not entirely original — many of the measuring techniques he employed he learned from the Egyptians, either through direct contact or through those who knew them. But what makes Thales, rather than the Egyptians, the founder of science and philosophy is that he took ideas which in Egypt were purely practical and pragmatic and made them abstract and scientific. He derived *principles* rather than merely practical techniques.

The best illustration of this distinction is Pythagoras and the famous theorem that bears his name. Pythagoras noticed that Egyptian builders knew that if they had three strings measuring three, four, and five units in length and arranged them into a triangle, they would obtain an exact right angle of ninety degrees. What Pythagoras did was to take that practical observation and turn it into a universal theorem: in any right triangle, regardless of size, whether on earth or in the heavens, the square of the hypotenuse will always equal the sum of the squares of the other two sides. The move from practical technique to universal philosophical and scientific theorem is precisely what Thales accomplished for the study of nature.

Turning his analytical mind toward the nature of the universe, Thales proposed that the first principle, the *archē*, of all things is water. You might think, what is the great insight in that? But the reason Thales is the founder of science and philosophy in the Western world is not because he chose water. The real reason we consider him the founder is that, in making that choice, Thales asserted two things: first, that there *is* an origin of all things, and second, that that origin can be determined through observation. In other words, Thales established a scientific method — an approach for analyzing and discussing the world. He is the founder not so much because of his answer, but because of his method.

Anaximander

The next Milesian, Anaximander, was a pupil of Thales. Anaximander advanced his master's position by pushing the first principle further back — not to water, but to something deeper and more primal than any of the four elements. He realized that the *archē* cannot be one of the four elements, because if it were, it would end up canceling out the opposing elements. If water — which is cold and moist — is the first principle, it will suppress everything that is dry and hot. So the

first principle cannot be an element, or it will dominate and distort everything.

Instead, Anaximander proposed that the first principle must be something earlier and more fundamental — something amorphous. This he called *the unlimited* or *the boundless*, which we might describe as a kind of primordial cosmic soup out of which the four elements and all of nature gradually separated. In this way, Anaximander moves considerably closer to what we now think of as evolutionary reasoning.

Anaximenes

The third Milesian, Anaximenes, might at first seem to take a step backward, since he argued that the first principle was air — which is, after all, one of the four elements. But I think what is happening here is that Anaximenes was no longer primarily interested in the *what* question; he was interested in the *how* question. His real contribution to pre-Socratic philosophy was to offer an explanation not for what the first principle is, but for *how* all the elements could be generated out of it.

Whatever the first principle may be, we need to answer the question: how can one thing become many things? How can a first principle separate out into the four elements and generate all of matter? Anaximenes' answer begins with air, and he proposed two opposing processes. Through *rarefaction* — a thinning and expanding process — air transforms itself upward into fire. Through the opposing process of *condensation*, air transforms itself downward into wind, then cloud, then water, then earth, and finally stone. By one of these two processes, a single element could literally become all the others.

With hindsight, we might note that Anaximenes would have done better to start with water, which already exists in three states — ice, liquid water, and steam — and as three physical phases: solid, liquid,

and gas. It would have been more intuitive to explain rarefaction and condensation using water. But he used air. Hindsight, as always, is everything.

Pythagoras

Pythagoras is a name all of us recognize, and he too was a pre-Socratic, also interested in the first principle. But Pythagoras offered a more elaborate, quasi-religious solution to the problem of origin, proposing that the real source of everything is numbers. As he expressed it: *all is number*.

Many people know that Pythagoras was among the first to identify a direct relationship between numerical ratios and musical harmonies — he found that certain mathematical ratios produce certain chords, octaves, fifths, and thirds, and he was not only a mathematician but a musician. But what many people do not realize is that Pythagoras did not stop there. He reasoned that just as numbers underlie music, so they are the very stuff and pattern of the universe — that beneath everything in the cosmos there is some kind of numerical ratio.

Pythagoras' faith that the entire natural world must display numerical order was so strong that he would sometimes indulge in great leaps of logic to accommodate it. When he observed the heavens, for example, he counted nine heavenly spheres. But that was unsatisfactory, because Pythagoras and his followers considered the number ten to be a mystical, almost magical number — they would arrange it like bowling pins and treat it as sacred. So Pythagoras very unscientifically posited a tenth sphere, which he called the counter-earth. You cannot see it, but it must be there, because the magic number demands ten.

Pythagoras was also a religious leader, and the path from mathematics to religion runs through his doctrine of the music of the

spheres. He believed that as those ten planets revolved in the cosmos, they rubbed against one another and produced a beautiful celestial music. Our physical, earthly ears cannot hear that music, however — the only way to perceive it is to purify the body, mind, and soul. And so Pythagoras founded a religious cult, and young men gathered around him to learn and practice spiritual disciplines that would so purify them as to allow them to hear that celestial harmony.

Pythagoras further believed in reincarnation. He held that the soul was immortal, and that until it achieved an inner harmony or attunement to the greater harmonies of the cosmos, it would be doomed to return to earth in a series of incarnations — coming back again and again until it reached a state of perfection. For Pythagoras, that perfection was a kind of mathematical harmony: when my soul is attuned to the soul of the cosmos, when I not only hear the music of the spheres but enter into it, I am at last ready to leave behind the earth and all its physical matter and ascend to the heavens.

Pythagoras' system combines philosophy, religion, and science, and he has therefore had a profound influence across all three fields. He paved the way for Plato's theories of the transmigration of the soul; the medieval obsession with numbers — seen throughout Dante's *Divine Comedy*, for instance — goes back to him; and Galileo's celebrated claim that mathematics is the language of the universe is pure Pythagorean thinking.

Heraclitus and the Eleatics: Change Versus Permanence

So far we have seen how the Milesians and Pythagoras answered the questions of *what* and *how*. But the later pre-Socratics confronted another related question: is the true nature of reality singular or

plural? Fixed or changing? I want to close with one pre-Socratic, Heraclitus, who believed it was plural and changing, and then two pre-Socratics — Parmenides and Zeno, both of whom came from Elea in Italy, and are therefore known as the Eleatics — who believed that the nature of reality was singular and fixed.

Heraclitus

Heraclitus possessed one of the richest, most enigmatic intellects of the ancient world. All of his speculations were recorded in cryptic aphorisms that have influenced such thinkers as Blake, Nietzsche, and T.S. Eliot. Still, his basic theory is clear and is best expressed in his well-known saying: *you can never step in the same river twice*. In other words, Heraclitus believed that all of nature is in constant flux. Every time you go to a river, it is a new river, because it is continually changing. According to Heraclitus, the only constant in the universe is change itself.

He believed that a perpetual yet creative strife existed between the elements and their qualitative pairs — a universal dance in which one element becomes another and one pair becomes another. It is a wonderful, beautiful image of ceaseless transformation. Heraclitus often used the twin images of the bow and the lyre to express how harmony can arise out of opposing, seemingly destructive forces. Think about the way a bow bends: the bend should snap it, but instead it gives the string the proper tension to send the arrow flying. Likewise, the bend of the lyre allows it to produce its beautiful harmony. So everything changes, and stability is in fact founded upon unending change.

Parmenides and the Eleatics

Most of us find Heraclitus' vision intuitive enough — of course things are always changing. Let us look, then, at the Eleatics, beginning with

Parmenides, who argued the exact opposite: that the nature of reality is one and unchanging.

In what may be a parody of Hesiod, Parmenides presents himself in his work as called by the goddess of truth to discern between true knowledge and mere opinion. True knowledge, he argued, rests on nature (*physis*) and is apprehended by speculative reason. Opinion, by contrast, rests on custom (*nomos*) and is perceived through the senses. Nature is fixed and unchanging, Parmenides held, and our reason apprehends that fixity and eternality. Custom, on the other hand, is always changing, and our senses are deceived by that change.

While opinion tells us that things change and move, reason dictates that this is an illusion. Parmenides argued two things. First, that being is perfect and complete and therefore cannot change — being is in a perfect state, and any change would diminish it. Second, that non-being does not exist: there is no such thing as nothing, no such thing as the void. And if there is no empty space in the universe, there is nowhere for being to move. He believed the universe consisted of a single, eternal, perfect, and complete mass — a system known as monism. Heraclitus, by contrast, believed in pluralism: that there are many things, and that those things change ceaselessly and eternally.

As for why being must be eternal, Parmenides reasoned that if being came into existence at some point, it could only have arisen out of non-being — and non-being does not exist. Nothing can come from nothing. If being exists, it must always have existed: perfect, unchanging, eternal.

Counterintuitive as this position is, Parmenides' contemporaries did not merely find it puzzling — they ridiculed it. Can't you see that there are many things, and that they change? Parmenides had a

brilliant pupil named Zeno who rose to defend his master's monism — and he did so in a unique and fascinating way. Zeno defended monism not by arguing for it directly, but by demonstrating in a series of paradoxes that a belief in change and pluralism, when taken to its logical endpoint, yields results that are even more absurd. This method of attacking a philosophical position by exposing its latent absurdities is known as *reductio ad absurdum*, and it remains a standard tool of philosophical argument to this day.

In his best-known paradox, Zeno exposes the self-contradictory nature of movement by proving that Achilles, though twice as swift as his opponent, could never catch an opponent given even a ten-foot head start. When the race begins, Achilles runs the ten feet — but by the time he arrives, his opponent has moved five feet ahead. Achilles runs those five feet — but now his opponent is two and a half feet ahead. And so on, infinitely. *Reductio ad absurdum*: if you believe in change and movement, you are forced to the ridiculous conclusion that Achilles can never catch his opponent, even though he is twice as fast. Many have poked holes in this paradox, and rightly so, but it was enormously influential, and the method of *reductio ad absurdum* that Zeno pioneered is still wielded regularly in philosophy today.

Resolution: Plato's Two Worlds

The philosophical impasse between Heraclitus the pluralist and the Eleatics the monists sent shockwaves through Western philosophy. The remaining pre-Socratics — Empedocles, Anaxagoras, Democritus, and Leucippus — all set as their goal the reconciliation of change and continuity, of pluralism and monism. There is unfortunately no time to examine each of them here, but if you read them, look for that unifying project.

Let me close instead with Plato, because Plato, I believe, arrived at the fullest and most satisfying answer to the pre-Socratic riddle. Plato said that the reason we have both monism and pluralism is that we actually have two worlds. Up in the realm beyond the senses is the world of *being*, eternal and perfect and unchanging — the world that monism correctly describes, and that can only be apprehended by the speculative reason. Our world, by contrast, is the world of *becoming*: it is pluralistic, it changes, it decays, and it dies, and it is perceived through the senses. Plato believed that our senses mislead us, and that the only true knowledge is knowledge of the world of being. In this way, Plato caps off the pre-Socratic tradition by offering a sweeping resolution to the great tension between permanence and change that had driven pre-Socratic thought from its very beginning.

Lecture 3: The Sophists and Social Science

Professor Jeremy Adams

Introduction: Reassessing the Sophists

Sophistry is generally considered, in modern vernacular English, a bad thing. To be a sophist is not good; sophism is a defective form of thought. All of these terms — sophistry, sophism, sophist itself — designate, for most people who think about philosophical issues, the wrong way to go. This is, I think, very unfortunate, historically speaking. The sophists, who gave their name to this whole family of words, were important, serious thinkers of the fifth and fourth centuries BC who were given a very bad name by Plato, because his mentor Socrates considered them intellectually immoral — and sometimes immoral in other ways as well. This insult survives in our current English usage, but it is really a misnomer. The sophists were professional teachers who tried to meet the educational needs of citizens of the Greek city-states of their time.

And their time was a moment of social change and of economic and cultural expansion. Athens was the center of the economic life of the Eastern Mediterranean. Athens itself, with perhaps 100,000 people, was the largest city in Europe. Athens had recently struggled with the greatest empire in the world, the Persian Empire, and against all odds had defeated it and brought it to a very advantageous peace. And for that reason, as well as others, Athens had become the center of philosophical thought in the Greek-speaking world.

Many of the sophists came from many different city-states, but most of them gravitated to Athens for at least part of their adult careers — certainly the ones we are going to talk about today. These sophists are in many ways the forerunners of the modern professional

intellectual, whether scientist or humanist. And obviously the forerunners of such a type must have something good about them, since the modern professional academic intellectual is supposed to be a model of how to think and talk and write — or so we like to think.

The Sophists and the Ionian Legacy

One of the most important things about sophist thought is its connection with the previous legacy of Ionian thought, particularly Ionian science. You have already been hearing about the wise men of Ionia — Thales and others — and their broad speculations on all kinds of topics, which began in the cities of the eastern Aegean, cities like Miletus and Ephesus. Heraclitus, for example, came from the royal family of Ephesus and was for a time its king. But after the Persians took over the eastern shore of the Aegean Sea — which is of course now western Turkey — many of the thinkers of those city-states fled across the Aegean to Athens. Athens was the mother city of many Aegean colonies; it was, for example, the mother of Miletus, the home of Thales, the first of the seven wise men, and a center of their general style of thought.

One aspect of Ionian scientific teaching was the conviction that the ethical laws of society — the *nomoi*, deeply revered by traditional Greek religion and lawgivers — had some basis in natural science and inhered, in some sense, in the nature of the world. The sophists partly disagreed. To the sophists, most if not all of the myth-based laws that men revered were artificial, merely conventional agreements. Some laws about human behavior, the sophists felt, did inhere in nature, in *physis*, the physical world — but once rationally analyzed, they turned out to be rather shocking. I will return to this point when discussing Thucydides' account of the dialogue between

Athenian officers and the representatives of the oligarchic city of Melos.

A further instance of the sophists' departure from Ionian thought was their abandonment of the objective analysis of nature in favor of the subjective analysis of the human being and of human society. The external world that had fascinated the seven wise men and later Ionian thinkers gave way to the subject — to the human being, to man, to use an unfortunately sexist term that was entirely the norm in the extremely sexist society of ancient Greece. Man was then considered the measure of all things, the center of the cosmos in every possible intellectual sense.

Now, Thales — born around 615 BC and who, by tradition, died in 546 BC, when the Persians took over the city of Sardis, the key to the Ionian coast — decided that the primal element of the world was water: water available in so many forms, solid, liquid, and gaseous, and evidently necessary to life. Thales then went on to explain many things by reference to this first principle. The method of the wise men was, of course, deductive: they would begin with a general premise derived through an insight, formulate it carefully, and then deduce from it all sorts of further conclusions.

Thales' pupil Anaximander carried on this tradition. He disagreed with his teacher — as any truly good pupil should — and decided that the first principle could not be water. It had to be something even more fundamental. Because it was so fundamental, it was in a sense invisible to the human being, not directly accessible to us, and yet one could discern this primal matter somehow everywhere. Anaximenes, the pupil of Anaximander, thought the primal element must be air. And so the speculation continued. Heraclitus was convinced that everything was constantly in motion, constantly in flux, nothing stable. Other Ionian scientists thought exactly the

contrary and would develop their theories of the universe accordingly.

Four Key Sophists

By contrast, the sophists of the fifth and fourth centuries BC preferred to speculate analytically about the inner motives of individual and group human behavior. Some examples of sophist analysis that radically challenged traditional opinion are the teachings of Gorgias, Protagoras, Callicles, and Thrasymachus.

Gorgias

Gorgias was not from the Ionian coast. He came from another zone of heavy Greek colonization — the island of Sicily, from the polis of Leontini, to be exact. He spent much of his adult life in Athens, however, and while there he wrote a work that can be translated as *On Non-Being and Nature*. In this deliberately provocative book, which he clearly meant to be as outrageous as possible, he argued — and seemed to his readers to demonstrate logically — that nothing really exists. Whether Gorgias truly held this doctrine, whether we ought to consider him a nihilist in the formal sense, or whether he was simply using the argument to expose the absurdity of logical demonstration, is debatable. He subsequently abandoned philosophy to teach rhetoric, the art of persuasion. Socrates meets him in Plato's dialogue the *Gorgias* as a professor of rhetoric who would teach the young men of Athens how to be effective in their political campaigns and, by extension, in their diplomatic and commercial dealings with people throughout the wider world.

Gorgias argued, among other things, that it was much better to give oneself fully to certain emotions because those emotions were fundamentally valid. The dramatic theater was a matter of great concern to Socrates, who disapproved of it very strongly — he

disapproved of the violent emotions it unleashed. Gorgias said, on the contrary, that it was far better to be genuinely moved by the emotions of tragic drama, to be profoundly affected, for example, by the drama of Agamemnon or of Hecuba, even if one had to cultivate that response a little, than to show that one had no literary sensitivity at all. That is exactly the kind of posturing — as Socrates would have put it — that so outraged Socrates and gave Plato the firm conviction that sophists like Gorgias represented the worst tendencies of human thought.

Protagoras

More serious, and in some respects almost a friend of Socrates, was Protagoras. His dates are very uncertain: some think he was born around 500 BC, others around 481, and the one surviving tradition is that he died near the end of the Peloponnesian War, probably around 411. That gives us a general picture of a man who spanned much of that crucial fifth century, in which Athens rose to extraordinary world power by defeating the Persians against all odds, and then fell by losing a generation-long war with her former ally Sparta — the great and terrible Peloponnesian War.

Protagoras can be considered the founder of the modern sciences of linguistics and social science. People are always trying to find a founder of social science. Thucydides, the great historian, is sometimes called the founder of social science; so is Montesquieu, the great eighteenth-century thinker whose division of power into executive, legislative, and judicial branches was so important to the founders of our own republic; and so is Machiavelli. Why not go back to classical antiquity and choose Protagoras? We do not, of course, have many of his writings, or of any of the sophists' writings. Most of what we know about them is reported by a major enemy — Plato — or by more sympathetic writers with whom we will deal later in this course.

Protagoras was an atheist, though he denied it in public for obvious political reasons. When challenged concerning his belief in the gods, he replied that he knew nothing about them and preferred to study and talk about things he did know something about — namely, the laws and customs of men, and the language men used to convey them — rather than the mythic language men used to convey the stories of the gods, which for most of Greek society formed the basis of all morality and all statute law. Protagoras especially enjoyed contrasting law and nature — possibly the most significant sophist departure from Ionian thought and from the general consensus of respectable opinion in Greece of their time. In pursuing this contrast, he was led to an ever-sharper sense of the absurdity of most human traditions and most human beliefs. Socrates reacted sharply against him, and we have the memory of this in various of Plato's dialogues.

Callicles

Callicles, of whom little is known, argued, according to Plato, that might is right. It is natural for human beings to be driven by the will to power — that will to power which would prove so important for nihilists and *realpolitik* leaders of European states in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, usually the ones we have fought rather than ourselves, though we have sometimes been accused of it by our own enemies. Callicles elevated the will to power to a position of high moral standing precisely because of its naturalness: it expressed, in his view, the genuine law of nature.

Thrasymachus

All of this is perhaps most bluntly summed up in the figure of Thrasymachus. Thrasymachus is a character in Plato's dialogue the *Republic*, but he was also an actual sophist. He was not himself Athenian; he came from an island to the east and traveled to Athens

to teach, where he gathered a considerable following among the young.

According to the *Republic*, he was a guest at the house of Cephalus, a kindly and wealthy old merchant in the city of Piraeus, the port of Athens, whose son invited Socrates, along with two brothers of Plato, to spend the night, share a banquet, and talk. This banquet, lasting until dawn, was an extraordinary intellectual occasion — a prolonged and wide-ranging discussion that produced an extraordinarily long book, if you believe that Plato was essentially writing up a banquet that actually took place. Even if he was not, it is a terrific story, describing an extraordinary kind of intellectual feast.

Socrates debates with various people in the course of this dialogue about the nature of justice, which is the central issue throughout. The first of his rivals in debate is Thrasymachus, and as they move toward the question of justice, Thrasymachus becomes extremely impatient. He is rude, rough, tough, and confrontational. He declares that what men call justice is simply the will of the strongest — the strongest man, the strongest state, the strongest party within a state at any given point. Whoever wins calls what he has done justice, and that is all there is to it. Get rid of your illusions.

Socrates dismantles him early in the *Republic*, not by an appeal to basic human feeling or to the ancient myths on which the community is founded, but to logic — by means of an extremely complicated logical argument which does not convince every modern reader. It is clear, though, that the kind of thinking represented most bluntly and crudely by Thrasymachus, with greater elegance by Gorgias, with greater restraint by Protagoras, and with comparable bluntness by Callicles, was deeply corrosive to the patriotic and moral myths that sustained the social cohesion of the Greek city-state.

The Athenians, for example, required strong belief in the myths of the goddess Athena and the god Poseidon, and a whole body of other myths surrounding the founding of their institutions. The fundamental constitution of Athens was grounded in stories of the terms the gods had struck with the men who settled under their protection, and it was traditional for Athenian politicians to invoke these sacred stories. Once those stories are dismissed as nonsense — and not only that, but when contrary moral principles are adduced as the scientific truth — then, at least among the educated citizen class, the stability of the state is in serious doubt.

This helps explain why Socrates reacted so strongly in favor of a logical argument for morality. Morality must be established as something that inheres in nature — not the physical nature the Ionians had been investigating, but the *physis* of the spiritual world, the spiritual nature which Socrates and Plato saw as the primary reality.

The Invention of History

The sophists coincided with more than just the outrage of Socrates. They coincided with what some call the invention of history. Some say the Greeks invented history — that is the traditional claim of Western learning. Others, protesting against what they see as an excessively ethnocentric Western view, point out that all peoples have had their histories, and one can certainly find in the ancient Near East very strong evidence of historical writing among the Sumerians, the Babylonians, the Assyrians, and supremely among the Jews, whose historical books of the Hebrew Scriptures are very much like what we have come to call history in the West — particularly in the Middle Ages, when Christianity provided a fundamental, if you

want, mythic basis for reality, and the will of God became the primary motive force in historical writing.

But the notion that the Greeks invented a new *kind* of history is, I think, perfectly defensible. The kind of history the Greeks invented attempted to be analytical about causes — to go beyond the will of God or the moral qualities of individual important actors, individual kings and queens and peoples — toward something more systematic and rational.

Herodotus

The first historian in this tradition is Herodotus, born in 484 BC and died in 428 BC. He was born in Halicarnassus, another Ionian polis in the eastern Aegean. He moved to Athens for a time, and then to the polis of Thurioi in Italy, where he eventually died after a tranquil old age. He wrote a great work called simply *Historiae* — meaning "researches." *Historiae* tended to be researches about geography or about what we would call politics, and no one had previously assembled a body of researches anything like the work of Herodotus.

What Herodotus was trying to figure out was the cause of the Greek victory in the Persian War, which simply did not make any sense in terms of resources — given not only the vast resources of the Persian Empire, but also the endless tendency of the Greek city-states to quarrel among themselves and to divide within themselves. The great fact was that Athens and Sparta got together. They became allies against the Persians, and the Spartan army and the Athenian navy together defeated the world's greatest military power. How was this possible?

Herodotus goes to work in properly sophist fashion, gathering facts. What are the peoples of the world? What kind of peoples do the Persians rule? What sort of people are the Greeks? He then moves into a kind of scientific psychology — an analysis of the

psychological motivations of the rulers of Persia and of the Greek world. It is a very broadly speculative work that opens up studies we today call anthropology as well as political science. I do not know why we do not call Herodotus the founder of political science; I suppose he is already called the founder of history, and that one title is thought to be enough for any ancient Greek.

Thucydides

His work is carried on by Thucydides, whose long book on the Peloponnesian War is obviously conscious of Herodotus' work, though it alludes to it only in very indirect ways. Thucydides' account of history is much more precise. It has less to do with mythic stories — though Herodotus does present such stories as possible causes, he tends to undercut them at pretty much every turn — and instead closely analyzes the motivations of the leaders of Athens and Sparta and their allied states, trying to explain the decisions and accidents that seemed to him to have turned the tide of history in the remarkable generation-long conflict that brought his world-dominant city-state down to defeat and profound humiliation.

It is hard to single out any central or final message of this masterpiece of historical writing. One can say that Herodotus settles for a kind of science of psychology, but one cannot focus on any single theme like that for Thucydides' *Peloponnesian War*. It is very clear, however, that Thucydides thought human behavior was very complex and very hard to predict — but fascinating — and that its analysis was the most compelling exercise of human reason, more compelling than the study of the kinds of topics that Protagoras, Gorgias, Socrates, or Plato wrote about. Was this a utilitarian science? Probably so. We get the impression that Thucydides thought understanding the mistakes of the past was a good way to develop a sense of how to avoid them in the future. But he does not make this

a formal principle; he presents his material analytically, in his own terms, and lets the reader draw his own conclusions.

The Melian Dialogue

One of the most strikingly dramatic moments of the *Peloponnesian War*, and one in which Thucydides shows his sophist legacy most clearly, is his account of a debate between the officers of an Athenian invasion force and the leading citizens of the oligarchic polis of Melos — a small and strategically insignificant island in the Aegean Sea in the sixteenth year of the war. This was militarily a very minor event, but it exemplified for the author much of Athenian behavior, and it serves as a prime example of sophistic political reasoning.

What happened is this. The Athenian navy arrives off the coast of Melos. Melos has remained neutral throughout the war. It is a polis founded by Dorians, and the Melians therefore consider themselves kinsmen of the Spartans. Accordingly, Melos had not joined the other city-states of Ionian origin that had naturally affiliated with Athens — first against the Persians, and then in the confederate empire the Athenians subsequently established. The Athenians had incorporated other non-Ionian city-states into their empire as well, and they wanted this to become a general principle: moving away from ethnic and linguistic connection as the basis of their confederation, they wanted any city-state within their strategic zone to be part of the Athenian alliance.

They sent against Melos a formidable expeditionary force — thirty of their own ships, six from the allied polis of Chios, and two from the allied polis of Lesbos, for a total of thirty-eight ships, carrying 1,200 hoplites, or heavily armed infantrymen, 300 archers, and 20 mounted archers — all Athenians — plus roughly 1,500 additional hoplites

from various allies. This was a major expeditionary force by the scale of warfare the Greeks knew at that time.

The Athenian generals — Cleomedes and Tisias, the *strategoi* — camped on the territory of Melos and called for a parley. What they had hoped for was to present the Athenian case to the assembled citizens of Melos and persuade them that resisting alliance was simply foolish and would do them no good, whereas alliance with Athens would mean paying the tribute tax but would secure Athenian protection in return. The Athenians were accustomed to making offers one could not refuse, and when people refused them, they became extremely unhappy — which was precisely the case here.

Now, Melos, being a Dorian state founded on the Spartan model, was an oligarchic state; it did not believe in democracy. The oligarchs who ran things refused to allow the Athenian generals to address the whole mass of the people. Instead, let the generals deal directly with them. The Athenians agreed, and the argument proceeded across what must have been a long and historically decisive day — historically decisive for the Melians, at any rate.

The exchange reaches a crucial turning point, or rather a crucial summary, about two-thirds of the way through. The Melians say:

"*It is difficult, as you may be sure we know, for us to oppose your power and fortune unless the terms be equal. Nevertheless, we trust that the gods will give us fortune as good as yours, because we are standing for what is right against what is wrong. And as for what we lack in power, we trust that it will be made up for by our alliance with the Spartans, who are bound — if for no other reason than honor's sake and because we are their kinsmen — to come to our help. Our confidence, therefore, is not so entirely irrational as you think.*"

The fundamental claim of the Melians at this point is clearly that honor exists and that kinship exists. They assume that honor inheres in the moral nature of the universe, and they appeal to traditional values handed down through the ages, as well as to the founding myths of their own community — myths stretching back, they claimed, some 700 years to the twelfth century BC. Many city-states did maintain long records of kings, councils, and the genealogies of leading families, so there was a certain amount of genuine research behind these mythic statements, even if considerable creativity entered into those genealogies as well.

The Athenian generals answered as follows. Now, of course, Thucydides was not present. We do not know whether this was Cleomedes or Tisias speaking. Thucydides populated his history with appropriate speeches — speeches of the sort that should have been made. Whether he had reliable reports from people who were there, which is entirely possible, or whether he composed the speeches himself, ultimately does not matter: what this dialogue shows, as do all the famous speeches of the *Peloponnesian War* — such as the Funeral Speech of Pericles — is what Thucydides thinks about the motive forces of human behavior.

The Athenians say:

"So far as the favor of the gods is concerned, we think we have as much right to that as you have. Our aims and our actions are perfectly consistent with the beliefs that men hold about the gods and with the principles which govern their own conduct. Our opinion of the gods and our knowledge of men lead us to conclude that it is a general and necessary law of nature to rule whatever one can. This is not a law that we made ourselves, nor were we the first to act upon it when it was made. We found it already in existence, and we shall leave it to exist forever among those who come after us. We are merely acting in accordance with it, and we know that you or anybody else with the

same power as ours would be acting in precisely the same way. Therefore, so far as the gods are concerned, we see no good reason why we should fear to be at a disadvantage."

Note the telling phrase: *our opinion of the gods and our knowledge of men*. That distinction between mere opinion about divine matters and genuine knowledge of human affairs is precisely the kind of sophistic distinction between what can be known and what belongs to the realm of myth that Plato will also make — though to entirely opposite ends — in the *Republic*. Whether this distinction slipped out spontaneously in the course of the actual debate, or emerged from Thucydides' own sophistic sensibility as he wrote, the message is perfectly powerful either way.

As for Spartan honor, the Athenians continue:

"*We must say that we congratulate you on your simplicity, but do not envy you your folly. In matters that concern themselves or their own constitution, the Spartans are quite remarkably good. As for their relations with others, it can be expressed shortly and clearly by saying that of all people we know, the Spartans are most conspicuous for believing that what they like doing is honorable and what suits their interests is just.*"

This is the argument of Thrasymachus: justice is whatever serves the interests of the stronger. And this kind of attitude, the Athenians add, is not going to be of much help to the Melians in their quest for safety.

The Melians, immovable, hold to their beliefs and their hopes for Spartan assistance. The Athenians therefore isolate the town of Melos with a wall on the landward side, blockade the harbor, and a long siege of attrition follows. Eventually the Melians launch a sortie against the Athenian lines and inflict casualties, and the Athenians respond in force. The Melians surrender before the walls are actually

taken by storm. All men of military age are killed. All women and children are enslaved. Melos, in effect, ceases to exist, though it was resettled later by some survivors, according to one account.

One has to wonder how many of those Athenian officers had been pupils of Callicles or of Thrasymachus. And what did Thucydides himself think? It seems perfectly clear that the sophistic distinction between nature and conventional law — grounded in nothing other than a strictly rational analysis of human behavior — is operative right here, in that central and chilling statement about how not just Athenians, but all men, behave.

Lecture 4: Plato — Metaphysics

Professor Philip Carey

Introduction: Plato and the Western Tradition

Plato is our great mind for this lecture, and it is hard to imagine a greater one, especially in terms of his influence on the Western intellectual tradition. Plato is a fourth-century Athenian philosopher and a student of Socrates, who is also the main character in Plato's writings, as we will see.

Plato is the founding figure of Western philosophy. There are philosophers before Plato, but none of them leave us a literary legacy that becomes the foundation for the rest of Western thought. Plato's writings are really at the root of the entire tradition of Western philosophy. The modern philosopher Alfred North Whitehead has said that Western philosophy is a series of footnotes to Plato — and that is almost not an exaggeration.

What Plato founds is a form of philosophy we can call metaphysics. When we get to the postmodern philosophers at the end of this series of lectures, this tradition of metaphysics — which is at the heart of Western philosophy — will be raised as both a fundamental problem and a fundamental resource of Western thought. Metaphysics is the notion that there is something like true being, transcendental being, that lies not merely in appearances but somehow beneath, behind, within, or above the appearances of this world. That is a deep notion — maybe a false notion, maybe a problematic notion, maybe a notion we cannot escape even when we are not entirely comfortable with it. That is what postmodern philosophers will often think about when they think about Plato: you cannot escape him.

You cannot escape Plato and still be a Western thinker. And yet this notion of metaphysics — of a deep, high, or true being — is a genuinely problematic notion. It is not just an idea that sits quietly in the Western tradition; it is a source of disagreement, debate, difficulty, and inspiration.

So Plato founds what we can call metaphysics. The word itself is Aristotle's. It is very typical of Aristotle, who was a student of Plato, to give a name to what Plato had already been doing. Plato was doing metaphysics before there was a name for it; he was on a quest for true being before Aristotle gave that quest the name metaphysics.

Now, Plato pursued this quest by writing philosophical dialogues — something like little plays in which characters discuss philosophical issues and engage in critical examination of them. The main character in these dramas is Socrates, Plato's teacher. To understand this, we need to say something about the setting of fifth-century and fourth-century Athens.

Socrates and the Sophists

When Plato was growing up in Athens and Socrates was at work, the educational system in Athens was changing. There had not really been a formal educational system before. If you were a young man — and it was only young men whose education was considered in those days, in what was a very sexist society — you were educated by your father within the household. The old aristocratic notion was: it was good enough for me, it will be good enough for my son. I know what it is to be a citizen of Athens, and I can teach my son what he needs to know.

But this was changing, because into Athens came an influx of new professional teachers called sophists — the first professional teachers

the Greek world had known. They taught for a fee, which meant, of course, that they claimed to possess knowledge worth paying for. They would seek out young men, get them talking, and try to persuade their fathers through those young men that they needed to invest in a proper education.

The kind of education the sophists typically offered was education in speaking. Athens was an ancient democracy — and imagine a democracy without television, newspapers, or any form of media other than the spoken word. Eloquence in speech was the fundamental form of media power in Athens; it was the fundamental form of political power. So the sophists offered, for a fee, the skill of speaking, which was in effect the skill of political power. Do you want your son to be a great man in Athens? I will teach him how. I will make him a powerful, virtuous, and persuasive person — someone who can speak on any subject in public, win arguments, win law cases, and move the Athenian assembly to war or to peace as his interests dictate.

For the sophists, then, wisdom meant the ability to speak eloquently and persuasively. They called themselves sophists because *sophia* is Greek for wisdom. They were wise men — or so they claimed — and they taught wisdom for a fee.

This may seem a peculiar idea: teaching wisdom for a fee. It certainly seemed peculiar to Socrates, who was a native Athenian rather than one of these foreigners coming in — for the sophists were all non-Athenians. Socrates had an entirely different program for young men. He did not claim to be wise. He did not claim to know all the answers. He certainly did not collect a fee. Instead, he walked around with young men and asked more fundamental questions than the sophists ever asked.

The sophists would teach you how to talk about virtue and vice, about good and evil, about right and wrong conduct. Socrates thought that before you could talk responsibly about such things, you needed to know what they actually were. What is virtue, after all? So Socrates would typically ask these basic questions — what is virtue? Or, taking a particular virtue, he would ask: what is justice? What is temperance? What is courage? What is piety? And he would say, I do not know. Now, young man, do you know? Let us find out together.

More comically, Socrates would sometimes approach someone who already thought they had the answers — a sophist, perhaps, or one of the elder statesmen of Athens. Imagine Socrates approaching a powerful man, someone who has moved large audiences with his speeches — someone like Pericles, let us say, though the chronology is a little awkward. Socrates would say: very well, Pericles, you have been persuading us what the right thing to do is. Tell me — what is justice, really? After Pericles gave an answer, Socrates would ask a further critical question, and the dialogue would go on in that fashion until Socrates had asked more and more probing questions and the great man could not hold his position.

The conclusion of these exchanges — in Plato's early dialogues — is that the big man does not know the answer. He cannot give a clear account of what something like virtue or justice truly is. These early Socratic dialogues of Plato end in perplexity, in the recognition of ignorance.

This has been called the Socratic wisdom — the wisdom of recognizing that one is not truly wise, the wisdom of not being a sophist. And the method of question and answer has been called the Socratic method: a method in which a teacher does not simply lecture and tell you what is what, but asks you questions, lets you reply, and then asks more critical questions, so that you discover you

do not know what you thought you knew. At least that is where things end in the early Socratic dialogues of Plato, and this was most likely how Socrates himself actually worked.

The Birth of Metaphysics: The Theory of Forms

The question then arises: is the message of Socrates simply the message of skepticism? At the end of the Socratic dialogues, we recognize that we do not know what virtue is. Is that the final answer — that we simply do not know?

Plato, in what are called his middle dialogues — his later literary productions — came up with the idea that no, we *can* give an answer to the question: what is virtue? We can give an answer to the question: what is justice? It takes considerable work, and it still requires the Socratic method of question and answer, which Plato called *dialectic* — from the Greek word for dialogue. But we can, in fact, arrive at an answer. We can find the true being of virtue. And that is when metaphysics is born. That is when the notion of a true being of things enters the Western tradition in a decisive way.

Plato will say that we can find the *form* of virtue. This is the famous Platonic doctrine of forms, which you may also have heard called the doctrine of Platonic ideas. I will use the word *form* for reasons I will explain in a moment.

Virtue itself is a form. The true being of virtue is a form. What we are asking for when we ask what virtue is — that is a form. We are asking for an unchanging essence of virtue. Contrast that with the many different ways of being virtuous: there is more than one way, there is more than one virtue, and what counts as virtue in Athens might differ from what counts as virtue in Sparta, and from what counts as virtue in the modern world. There are many virtues, and what is reckoned virtuous changes across time and culture. But Plato wants

to know the true being of virtue — virtue itself, the essence of virtue, the unchanging being of virtue.

In wanting that, Plato was inventing Western metaphysics. And the true being of virtue, as he conceives it, has two essential features. First, it is one thing, not many. There are many virtuous acts and many kinds of virtue, but there is only one form or essence of virtue — that single thing which governs, gives form to, and confers identity and nature upon all the many acts of virtue. The one form forms the many; the one-and-many relationship is crucial for Plato and for the Platonic tradition. Second, it is an *unchanging* form. The form of virtue does not change. Virtue is fundamentally the same thing now as it was in Plato's time. Some aspects of what we count as virtue have shifted across history, of course — what makes a good American is different from what made a good Athenian. But virtue *itself* has not changed. Virtue itself is eternal.

So here is this notion of a deep, high, fundamental true being which is unchanging and eternal — deeper than the changes of the historical world, and more real than the appearances of history and culture.

Plato calls this the *form*. One can also call it the *essence*, which is a good term for it. Plato also uses the word *idea*, though this does not mean the same thing that idea means today. Nowadays, when we speak of an idea, we mean something in our heads. For Plato, an idea is not something in your head. It is something you *see* — it is literally the Greek word for what is seen. But he means something seen with the mind's eye, not the eye of the body. The form of virtue is something you will never see with your physical eyes; it is something you can only see, as it were, with your mind. That is why he calls it an idea: it is an unchanging essence which is not located in the physical world and not located in your mind, but located metaphorically above us in an unchanging world, which we will get to. In order to

avoid the confusion between Platonic ideas and modern ideas-in-our-heads, I will use the term Platonic *forms*.

In summary, then, Platonic ideas or forms are true being — the unchanging essence or nature of things in this world, especially of ethical virtues. We apprehend these things with the mind's eye, not the body's eye.

Mathematics as an Analogy

Let me suggest an analogy that may make this easier to follow. Think about mathematics. Mathematics is very different from virtue, I know, but for Plato they have something important in common. What Plato is doing, I think, is in some sense comparing ethical thought about virtue and justice to mathematical thought about triangles or addition.

Consider a triangle. Think about a mathematics professor drawing a triangle on a chalkboard. The professor is going to go on to prove some theorems about this chalk triangle — the Pythagorean theorem, for instance. But wait. That is a slight misstatement, is it not? Because the professor is not really proving a theorem about the chalk triangle. If you tried to measure the angles of a chalk triangle, you would get something close to 180 degrees, but very probably not exactly 180, because the lines are not perfectly straight and the angles are not perfect. In a sense, the chalk triangle is not a *real* triangle.

Which raises the question: what is a real triangle, then? The real triangle we learn about in a mathematics class is not something you can see with the eyes of your body. You will never see the real triangle about which the Pythagorean theorem holds. Except — you will see it with your mind's eye. Think of what happens in a mathematics class when you are struggling to understand a proof,

and then suddenly it comes to you: *aha, I see it, I get it*. That kind of seeing is the kind in which you really know what the mathematics teacher has to teach. And that kind of seeing is also, Plato thinks, the kind in which we come to see the form of virtue and justice.

This means that if you are a Platonist, you have to come to terms with the idea that the things you see with your physical eyes are not the truly real things. They are not exactly illusions, but they are not as real as the real triangle. The chalk triangle is there; it is real in some sense. But it is not the *real* triangle, and what we want to know about is that real triangle — the thing you can only understand with your mind's eye. And here again is metaphysics: we are looking at something deeper than what appears on the surface, deeper than anything you can see with your eyes, deeper and more true than the world of appearance.

Plato's Vocabulary

Plato develops a set of technical vocabulary for marking the distinction between the true being of the forms and the sensible things of the physical world. Let us run through it briefly.

The true triangle — the one you can really know and see with your mind's eye — is something we have *knowledge* of. That is the kind of knowledge you attain in a mathematics class. The kind of acquaintance you have with things you can see with your eyes is mere *opinion*. Imagine trying to work out the Pythagorean theorem by actually measuring chalk or pencil triangles. You would arrive at an approximation of the theorem, which Plato would call opinion, not knowledge. Knowledge is when you truly understand the theorem — when you can say, aha, I see it, it is absolutely clear, it is crystalline and certain. That is real knowledge. Whereas the sort of acquaintance you acquire through sensory experience is not really

knowledge at all; it is merely opinion, of the sort you would form by measuring a collection of imperfect drawn triangles.

Another feature of Plato's vocabulary concerns the relationship between the chalk triangle and the real one. The chalk triangle is an imitation, an image, a reflection, a shadow of the real triangle. That cluster of metaphors — imitation, image, reflection, shadow — is one Plato loves to use to describe the relationship between true being and appearance. He sets the *world of being* against the *world of becoming*, which is his term for the world of change.

The chalk triangle, as it were, imitates the real triangle; it is an image, a reflection, a shadow of it. Get used to the idea that what you see, touch, taste, and feel is only a shadow of the real thing, which you see with your mind's eye. The real thing is unchanging and therefore belongs to *being* — Being with a capital B — as opposed to *becoming*, the world of change. The true triangle belongs to being, not becoming. It is also what Plato calls *intelligible*, as opposed to *sensible*. The word sensible, for Plato, derives from the senses: it means anything you can perceive with your five senses — anything visible to the eye, audible to the ear, tangible to the touch, anything you can smell or taste. Those things belong to the world of becoming, the world of opinion, the world of shadows. Whereas the thing you truly understand with your mind's eye is intelligible — from the word intellect or intelligence, which in Greek means to understand. The intelligible thing is the thing that you understand. Plato sometimes compares it to visibility, speaking of something visible to the mind's eye, but that is clearly a metaphor: you do not see the true triangle with your body's eye.

Once you have this vocabulary in hand, you begin to get the feel of Plato's talk about true being and of why it is so very different from what you see, taste, or touch — what we ordinarily call the real world. I can bang on the podium, and that is real enough. But for

Plato, that is not ultimate reality. Why should you think that something you can knock against is the ultimate reality? Plato wants to know about ultimate reality, and it takes some adjustment to think about a reality more real than what we normally call the real world.

The Allegory of the Cave

Let me describe an allegory, a symbolic story that comes from Plato himself, which will help you grasp this metaphysics of true being that goes beyond the world of appearances. This is the Allegory of the Cave, and it comes from Plato's *Republic*.

Begin by imagining yourself in a dark cave. You are not merely in a dark cave, however; you are tied up, chained in such a way that your head cannot turn. You are looking straight ahead at a wall, and what you see on the wall are shadows. The shadows are cast by a fire burning behind you. You cannot turn around to look at the fire, nor at the objects casting the shadows. What casts the shadows, it does not matter too much, but let us say cardboard cutouts of things: a cardboard cutout of a triangle, a cardboard cutout of a tree, and a cardboard cutout we might label virtue. You are looking at the shadows of these things on the wall.

That is a strange picture, says Plato — but it is us. It is where we are right now. You are looking at, say, a table or a chair or a video screen, and those are all shadows. What would it be like to look away from them at something real?

That is hard to imagine when you have spent your whole life chained up, looking straight ahead at the shadows, convinced that those shadows are the only real thing — what many people call the real world, the practical world, the world of money and power and things that matter.

For Plato, that is not the real world, but you cannot see this until something changes. What must change, metaphorically, is the following. First, you have to be *liberated* — unchained. The image of freedom and liberation is crucial here. Second, you *turn around*. The Greek word for turning is translated into Latin as *conversio*, from which we get our word *conversion*. This is a conversion experience, a turning away from the darkness toward the light. Third, you must *climb*. The cave is underground, and you must ascend — and this ascent is the image of the soul's journey from a world of appearance and illusion to a world of true being.

So: liberation, conversion, and ascent. You climb up and you emerge into the light — the real light, the light of day, the light of the sun. This is what Plato calls the intelligible world, the world of true being. We might call it the *other world*, as in other-worldliness, because Plato is telling us about a level of being that many of us never realized existed, while we remained convinced that the cave was the real world.

This is the world of eternal being, of truth that never changes. Everything down in the cave changes — triangles in the cave change because you can erase or redraw them — but the true triangle you come to understand in a mathematics class does not change. So by climbing up out of the cave you are moving out of the world of change and death and into the world of eternity and true being.

Of course, the first thing that happens when you emerge is that you are blinded — it is too bright up there. Learning about true being is hard. The mind gets dazzled, just as your eyes would be dazzled coming into bright sunlight for the very first time in your life. You cannot take it in immediately. But you practice; you learn; you get educated. You may start off by looking at reflections and shadows in the light, but eventually you become able to look directly at real things — not cardboard cutouts, not shadows, not reflections, but

the real thing — and see what the essence, the form, the true being of a tree is, or of a triangle, or, most importantly of all, of virtue and justice and the good.

The good, in fact, is the last thing you see. The good is the sun itself, the shining light that illuminates everything else. It is the first principle, the supreme being — Plato calls it *the good*. In religious terms one might call it the supreme good. Christian theologians would later arrive at this passage and say: ah, the supreme good — that is God. The source of being, just as the sun makes possible the life of plants and animals on earth, giving being to things and also the intelligibility that makes it possible for us to perceive them.

That is what happens in education, in Plato's view. As we learn to turn away from mere appearances — the chalk triangle being only an imitation of the real thing — we are, in a process of growing education, gradually able to see the real things themselves. The chalk triangle is just a symbol, an imitation of the real triangle; but with enough mathematical education, you come to see the real thing directly.

The Return to the Cave

Then something else happens. You cannot stay up there — not until you die; we will come to that in the next lecture. You cannot remain in the other world where all is light and unchanging truth. Eventually you have to go back down into the cave.

And in fact, following Plato's advice, what you will do is go back to educate a group of young men, teaching them about true virtue. Though it must be stressed: they cannot simply be told what true virtue is. They must climb up themselves, with the help of a teacher — perhaps someone like Socrates, asking questions, pressing them: what is true virtue? Each student has to find the answer for himself,

see it for himself. This is exactly like mathematics: you cannot merely memorize a theorem and be said to understand it. You have to see it with your own mind's eye. The teacher helps you get started, but you do not simply memorize what the teacher says — you come to see it yourself. Then, if you are following Plato's program of education, you get dragged back down into the cave and made to be king.

That is the idea. Plato wants the rulers of the republic to be people who genuinely know what the good is, who know what true justice and true virtue are. You have to know some metaphysics in order to be a good ruler, Plato thinks, because you have to know what virtue and justice and goodness truly are. This is why Plato places this entire program of education at the center of his great treatise on politics, the *Republic*. And the heart of that treatment of education is the vision of the true being of the forms.

So you come back down into the cave. The first thing that happens, once again, is that your eyes have to adjust. You have grown accustomed to seeing things in the bright light of day; now you are back in the cave and you can barely see anything. You stumble around. You act like a philosopher — like those people who fall down wells because they are contemplating the sky. That was Thales, the first philosopher, of whom there is the famous joke: he was gazing at the heavens and fell into a well. Philosophers are like that. They have seen the light, and now they must readjust to the darkness of what we call the real world. They are not good at making money — Socrates certainly was not. They are not good at playing political power games — Socrates was not good at those either. They do not teach the sort of things the sophists teach, and they are not skilled at what the sophists are skilled at.

But the kind of person you truly want ruling the city is not the sophist, not the person who believes in political power games, not the political consultant and those who follow political consultants —

you do not want them in power. You want the people who have seen what the true good really is. You want people like Socrates.

Socrates avoided political office, but Plato is thinking: if you have someone like Socrates in your midst, what you do is make him king. You say, you must rule over us, because you understand more about this than we do. Even if you do not think you fully know what true virtue is, at least you are asking the right question. And Plato thinks that in fact you can ask this question, you can guide young people toward the answer, you can enable them actually to see what true virtue is — and once they have seen it, you drag them back down into the cave and make them rule over you. You make philosophers into kings. That is the key idea of Plato's political theory.

So Plato is not only inventing this new form of philosophy called metaphysics — he is saying that metaphysics is the real basis of a well-ordered human life. It is the basis of ethics. It is the basis of politics. The person you want to have power is the one who actually understands what the true good really is. Knowledge of true being is the most practically important thing there is, if what we want is a good life — a life in the city, in the republic, that is genuinely worth living. And that is why Plato wants to make philosophers kings. But we will hear more about that in a later lecture.

Lecture 5: Plato, Politics

Professor Dennis Dalton

Introduction: Plato and the Republic

In this lecture on Plato's theory of politics in the *Republic*, we will be looking at one of the foremost philosophers of all time. He was born in 428 BC, which means that he lived some 2,400 years ago. He was inspired by another great philosopher, his teacher Socrates. He founded the Academy at age forty in order to set forth his ideas, and during that time he wrote the *Republic*, his most famous work and the major announcement of his entire political philosophy.

It was Alfred North Whitehead, a professor of philosophy at Harvard, who said — perhaps with some exaggeration — that Plato's philosophy is so encyclopedic that the whole of Western philosophy can be seen as merely a series of footnotes to Plato. Plato's purpose in writing the *Republic* was to bring philosophy to politics, to uplift politics, to inject into politics vision and character. As he set forth these ideas, he manages to expound some of the truly great concepts of the Western tradition — ideas of justice, peace, goodness, beauty, and truth, but perhaps above all of power. As we treat Plato and then Aristotle and then after that Hobbes and Locke, we will be focusing increasingly on the idea of power, because this is, of course, at the center of political philosophy.

The Question of Justice: Three Responses

The *Republic* begins with the question, "What is justice?" and slides into more and more consideration of power. It is done in the form of a dialogue — a dialogue between Socrates and a number of his

friends and adversaries. There are three main responses in the first part of the *Republic* to this key question: What is justice?

Polemarchus

The first response is given by one of Socrates' young friends, Polemarchus. He addresses the question and says: justice is no more than helping one's friends and harming one's enemies. That is, it is no more than an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, as said in another biblical context. Socrates argues against this and, very significantly — for the first time in political thought — announces that justice, or as he defines it, right conduct, cannot ever mean to inflict harm on another person.

Socrates disagrees with Polemarchus' definition, sweeping it aside and saying that justice or right conduct must always mean to elicit the very best from an individual, to treat that individual in a way that he or she is uplifted or humanized as a result of that interaction. He introduces an important concept here — noted in our glossary — of *arete*. *Arete* means the virtue, excellence, or gift that any individual has, and each of us possesses this particular quality. Just behavior, right conduct, must therefore always mean trying to bring out one's *arete* — one's particular gift, one's excellence.

Socrates says that can never be done through punishing or harming an individual. Polemarchus' definition of justice — while it might be necessary at times to harm people in self-defense — cannot be seen as right conduct or just conduct in all circumstances. Right conduct or just conduct, Socrates says at the end of this crucial first exchange with Polemarchus, does not mean an eye for an eye. It means dealing with others in a humane manner.

Thrasymachus

The next discussant is Thrasymachus. He is entirely different from Polemarchus. Polemarchus was a young, eager student, but

Thrasymachus is a cynic — a person whom we refer to in Greek philosophy as a sophist, who believes that all values are necessarily relative. The exchange between Socrates and Thrasymachus is, I think, one between a philosopher like Socrates who is defending ideal values, and Thrasymachus the Relativist, who is saying that justice can mean no more than might, and might is always right.

From Thrasymachus' point of view — and this is an important point in political philosophy — as we look back on the tradition of political thought, we wonder how Plato could have introduced in this text so many critical questions all around this discussion of justice. Justice, Thrasymachus says, is no more than what is in the interest of the strongest party. That person or party or political group which happens to have charge of a situation will define justice, and whatever that party says is justice will be just. This is a cynical definition of justice that Thucydides discusses in his history of the Peloponnesian War and deplores. It was a definition that had characterized Athenian thinking during that war, during the debasement of values and the cynicism into which the Athenians lapsed.

Socrates says, "Thrasymachus, this cannot be justice. It cannot be right conduct to insist that might is always right, that the stronger must always prevail." And at this point Socrates makes an analogy that is critical for the *Republic* — the first of a series of analogies — between the politician and the physician, the political leader and the doctor. The politician, Socrates says, must be held to certain standards just as the physician is held to certain standards. What we want in politics is true professionalism of the kind that we have in medicine. We want a kind of Hippocratic oath for politics. Remember that Hippocrates was living during the time of Socrates and must have influenced Plato's writing in this respect.

When Plato tells Thrasymachus that the analogy of the physician to the politician should prevail, he means that politicians should act more like the professionals that we have in medicine. And how do good physicians act? Presumably, a good physician never sees his patient as a weaker person upon whom he may impose his will. The physician sees his patient as one to be regarded with humanity and considered with genuine interest. If doctors — good doctors — were the models and set the standards for politicians, we would have in politics a much more humane practice. We would have a professional practice. We would be able to hold people to higher standards. What is justice, then, according to Socrates? Justice is a kind of human relationship characterized by what we ideally find in the relationship between the good doctor and the patient — a relationship notable for its humanity and its concern. And Socrates will say that justice must first of all be concerned with the Hippocratic maxim: *first, do no harm*. If only in politics we could have that maxim — first, do no harm.

Glaucon and the Ring of Gyges

After the exchange between Socrates and Thrasymachus, the third part of the exchange is between Socrates and a young student of his by the name of Glaucon — who happens to be an older brother of Plato. Glaucon tries to revive Thrasymachus' argument. He wants to expand it in a way that applies not just the idea that might is right, but to say that in human nature there is a quality of selfishness that makes all our interests necessarily allied to our selfish behavior. He asks Socrates: how did justice originate?

Glaucon answers his own question by saying that clearly it originated because in the state of nature — in our original human condition — people were all concerned with protecting one another and protecting themselves. There was a state of mutual insecurity in which people were afraid and needed protection: protection of their

families and of themselves. In that state of vulnerability, law was created. People grouped together and proposed a contract, a covenant, that set forth the idea that law or justice meant mutual protection — that the weak would be protected against the strong. Justice is law, but law is contrived. There is nothing transcendental in it, nothing particularly moral — only protection against those who may be stronger.

To reinforce this argument, Glaucon says, "Let us consider a myth, Socrates — the myth of Gyges." He draws it from the Greek historian Herodotus and embellishes it a great deal. It tells the story of a poor shepherd who was wandering one day in the fields and came upon a chasm. He descended into it and discovered a skeleton — a huge skeleton — and the skeleton had a ring. The ring, glowing there, attracted Gyges so much that he went and took it from the skeleton's finger. He put it on, not quite knowing what it meant. But as he began to circulate among other shepherds, he noticed that when he turned the ring a certain way, his friends would say, "Where is Gyges? What has happened to Gyges?" He soon understood that turning the ring in a certain way made him invisible.

Now Glaucon asks Socrates: imagine if we had this power to become invisible — what do you think we would do? Socrates says he does not know. Glaucon says: "I'll tell you what Gyges did." Did he found a philanthropic organization and give away his newfound fortune to charity? No, quite the opposite. With his invisibility, he managed to maximize his own interest to the extent of entering the castle, murdering the king, seducing the queen, and seizing the throne.

From Glaucon's point of view, the lesson of the myth of Gyges is that we all, if we could have the power of invisibility, would do precisely this. We would all become like Gyges: selfish and greedy, and above all, lusting for power. That seizure of power, that will to dominate, that desire to prevail — that is in all of us. What is justice, then?

Justice is no more than a contract that keeps people under control, that offers protection from Gyges and that kind of behavior. Justice is law — but law is contrived.

Socrates' Response: Three Waves of Reform

Socrates' response to Glaucon takes us into the rest of the *Republic*'s argument. Socrates argues that we cannot all be seen as Gyges. Is there a Gyges gene — a dominant gene in all of us that is selfish, greedy, and lustful? He says to Glaucon that this is the worst way of viewing humanity. We must try to elicit the best from people and not look to their worst. We must try to define a common interest, not just a selfish interest. And that common interest is that justice should prevail — that the good state will certainly emerge.

How will this good state emerge? Socrates says there must be three reforms, three waves of change — what he calls tidal waves of transformation that must sweep over the corrupt *polis* and transform it into something new, better, right, and true.

The First Wave: The Equality of Women and Men

The first wave of change is to make women and men equal in terms of their qualifications for rule. This is critical, for at this time women were regarded — as we will see when we discuss Aristotle — as those who must perform no public duties, have no property, whose responsibilities were confined entirely to the home. They therefore held no public office of any kind, and to suggest that women and men might be equal — even equal leaders of the *polis* — was revolutionary.

Why does Plato want to do this? He is looking to the female population as people he can recruit, individuals he can use. Women should not be excluded from rule as they had been. But only, and this is Plato's emphasis, those women who are truly qualified — just

as men must be truly qualified. That is, women who are intelligent, who can pass the rigorous examinations — the kind of professional boards that we might imagine for politics — who can become part of the intellectual elite that Plato is proposing.

The Second Wave: The Guardians

The second wave is to create an extended family of rulers that Plato calls the **guardians** — an elite of intellectuals chosen by the same rigorous standard by which we choose our physicians. This elite will rule the *polis*, forming a minority within the community.

Within this extended family, two major reforms will be undertaken. First, these guardians will not own property. The abolition of property is key, because from Plato's point of view it is necessary in order to abolish greed, lust, possessiveness, and all the rest among his leaders. Second, the nuclear family itself will be abolished. This will be a truly extended family, with property in common, spouses in common, and children in common. These rulers will therefore not be tempted by nepotism or possessiveness. They will be truly ideal in the sense that they will be free of the problems that characterized rulers during that period. This critical reform transforms the rulers into those who are thinking not of their own private families or property, but of the state and the needs of the state.

The Third Wave: Absolute Political Power

The last of the three waves is to put these guardians in positions of absolute political power, with no checks or balances. These are the people who will administer the state. From the guardians, the vision will emerge. From these few, rule will be just and rational. The confidence is that individuals who are free from concerns about family and property will be able to shape policy in which reason truly rules.

Two Parables

Plato argues his position further through two parables or allegories designed to reinforce his point about the just state — a state ruled by a group of intellectuals, an elite gifted by virtue of their vision, their education, and their liberation from the narrow, partial, selfish concerns of family and property, with both men and women included in what is truly a revolutionary proposal.

The Parable of the Ship of State

The first parable is the **Ship of State**. Imagine, Plato says, that you are going on a voyage. You get on the ship and find that the master — the captain — is not only short-sighted and deaf, but stupid and completely ignorant of seamanship. Because the master is so ignorant, the crew finds it very easy to manipulate him, to appeal to him, to flatter him, and thereby to run the ship themselves. But the crew happens to be entirely unqualified as well — their only concern is the maximization of their own pleasure on the voyage, and so they turn the voyage into what Plato calls a drunken carousal. The third party on the ship — the navigator, the one person you might look to for guidance — is viewed with contempt. The passengers are therefore destined for a terrible voyage, and only shipwreck can be the conclusion.

Plato says this parable is directly analogous to the democratic state — the democratic state he knew in Athens. In that state, the master represents the sovereign people: ignorant, short-sighted, deaf. The crew represents the demagogic politicians of Athens, the people who seduced the master and managed to persuade him that they were right and that they should prevail. During the Peloponnesian War, these politicians, from Plato's point of view, were catastrophically bad leaders. Not only did Athens lose the war against Sparta in 404 BC — it was not merely defeated but overrun and humiliated, marking the end of its great civilization. How could this have

happened? Because it was run by a democratic government, and Plato despises democracy.

What Plato wants is a ship truly run not by the ignorant captain, not by the crew of self-interested politicians, but by the navigator — seen not with contempt, but honored as the person who possesses the most knowledge. That navigator is the one individual who has a command of seamanship, who has knowledge of astronomy, who is a scientist, just as the physician is a scientist. And that navigator should be analogous to the philosopher-ruler — the person who is in charge because he or she has mastered the scientific principles of how to run a state: political science.

The Allegory of the Cave

The second and more famous parable is the **Allegory of the Cave**. Plato now asks us — with the extraordinarily vivid imagination he possesses — to imagine entering an underground cavern filled with darkness and illusion, in which people can see only shadows and not reality. They look at the walls of the cave and mistake the shadows they see there for reality. This, Plato points out, is profound ignorance — and yet the people who inhabit the cave are entirely unaware of it.

What would happen, he asks, if a person were able to turn around, see the light at the entrance of the cave, follow that long tunnel out into the open, and for the first time, by the light of the sun, come to understand that the reality outside the cave is true reality, and that what had been mistaken for reality inside the cave was only illusion? What if that person came back and told the cave's inhabitants: "You have been looking only at shadows on the walls, not at reality"? What would they do?

Plato says — alluding to the fate of Socrates, who was sentenced to death and forced to take hemlock in 399 BC — they would kill this

person, just as they killed Socrates. The most righteous man in Athens, when he came back into the cave bearing truth, was murdered. What kind of state would be needed to put people like Socrates in power?

Plato says that the state we must have would need to educate the population in such a way that when that enlightened person returned from outside the cave, he or she would be welcomed as a ruler rather than condemned as a lunatic. People must be educated — not necessarily so that the whole majority can get out of the cave, but at least so that they can receive that person upon their return with an understanding that they have been truly enlightened. We want those individuals to rule.

At the very end of the allegory, Plato writes in the *Republic* — in one of its finest passages:

We don't want an unjust polity any longer in which men live fighting one another about shadows and quarreling for power as if that were some great prize. The kind of just polis that we need will have rulers unlike any ruler of the present day, because our rulers will think of holding power only as an unavoidable necessity and have no lust for it. For the truth is that you can have a well-governed society only if you can discover for your future rulers a better way of life than being in office. Then only will power be in the hands of men who are rich, not in gold, but in the wealth that brings happiness, a good and wise life. All goes wrong when, starved for lack of anything good in their own lives, men turn to public affairs, hoping to snatch from thence the happiness they hunger for. They set about fighting for power, and this internecine conflict ruins them and their country. The life of true philosophy is the only one that looks down upon offices of state, and access to power must be confined to men who are not in love with it. So whom else can you compel to undertake the guardianship of the Commonwealth, if not those who, besides understanding best the

principles of government, enjoy a nobler life than the politicians today and look for rewards of a different kind?

Conclusion: Plato as Philosopher of Power

Notice the central points Plato makes in this crucial passage at the end of the allegory of the cave. First and foremost, it is one's view of power that is all important. One must not lust for power. One must receive power as an obligation — as a responsibility to the whole state — and use it in service of the common interest, not a selfish one.

Plato believes in a concentration of power among the few, among this elite at the top. That is true. But this elite will regard power in an entirely different way. They will look at it with disinterest. They will see power as a responsibility, not as an object to be acquired.

When Plato says that the problem today is that people are starved — starved for lack of anything good in their own lives — and then enter politics, he makes a critical point: the political leaders we want must be individuals who have integrity and character, who have discovered their *arete* as that of political leadership, and who enter politics precisely because they understand it to be a noble profession comparable to the profession of medicine.

When we look to Plato, then, we look to a philosopher of power, and he is to be acclaimed as the first political philosopher who sets forth power as a noble enterprise.

Lecture 6: Plato, Psychology

Professor Philip Carey

Introduction: Why More Plato?

We have three lectures on Plato because Plato deserves it, being as great a mind as any of them. In the last lecture we talked about true being, or metaphysics. Now we will talk about a connected, related notion: the true self — the soul. Plato gives us a way of thinking about the deep layers of the self that is connected to his way of thinking about the deep, or high, or true nature of being. So there is a connection between metaphysics — the study of true being — and psychology, which is the study of the soul, the study of the *psyche*, which is Greek for soul. Psychology in ancient thought therefore meant a philosophical study of the soul.

Plato is in many ways the most influential psychologist of the Western tradition, because he gave us what is still one of the dominant ways of thinking about the nature of the soul and indeed the nature of the human self.

Plato and the Invention of Dualism

Plato was the first — I think he probably was — to have invented this form of thought: **dualism**, that is, the notion that the human self divides cleanly into two parts, soul and body. It seems obvious, doesn't it? But it was not obvious to anyone before Plato.

In Homer, for instance — the great Greek poet before Plato — the human self would divide into quite a number of parts, not just two. There would not be a sort of mental half called soul and a physical half called body. The terms for psychological functions might include

heart, spirit, breath, liver, or kidneys. The same word, *pneuma*, could be translated as either breath or spirit. The same thing, by the way, is true of the Old Testament: "kidneys" is an Old Testament word for something like "guts," and "bowels of compassion" is a New Testament phrase that comes from Hebrew ways of speaking. But both the Hebrew ways of talking in the Old Testament and the ancient Greek ways of talking before Plato had this whole range of terms which overlapped. Your heart and your spirit covered part of the same aspects of yourself. Your spirit included your breath. In Hebrew, your *nefesh* — your soul — literally meant your neck. Your guts included both your physical guts and how you feel in your gut. Your heart included both your physical heart and how you feel in your heart.

So before Plato, there was no notion of a clean bifurcation or division of the self into two parts — soul and body, mental and physical. That seems like an obvious division to us, but that is because Plato lived and wrote and thought. And if he hadn't, we might not find it so obvious. This is what happens when you have a great mind: you end up thinking the way you do in the twentieth century, in part because of the way he thought two and a half millennia ago.

The Phaedo: The Soul, the Body, and Immortality

How do we arrive at this picture of the human self divided into two? It begins with a concern for the immortality of the soul, which is the key theme in Plato's middle dialogue, the *Phaedo*. The *Phaedo* is set on the last day of Socrates' life. In this middle dialogue, as in the early Socratic dialogues, Socrates is the main character. But instead of the question-and-answer method which typically leads to perplexity, in the *Phaedo* Socrates has a point to make. He is actually trying to prove something — to show that the soul is immortal. He is

also trying to help his students see this for themselves, and indeed to comfort them, because they are in great grief. Their teacher is about to die. He is about to drink the hemlock, which means he is about to be executed. Socrates is very calm about it. He is not afraid of death, but all of his students are. So in order to comfort them, he tries to show them that the soul is immortal.

This is not as straightforward as it might seem. In Homer, for instance, the soul is exhaled in the last breath of a dying warrior. There is a scene many times in Homer's poems where a spear goes through a man's heart, he breathes his last, and the soul goes out of the mouth and gets scattered on the wind — scattered and gone. Perhaps it goes to a dark place called Hades, where it lives a kind of shadow existence. Perhaps it is scattered on the wind. Homer does not have a consistent theology about that. But Socrates' pupils in the *Phaedo* are worried that this is exactly what will happen to Socrates' soul. Because after all, after the last breath, there is no soul in the body, no life in the body. So the last breath must carry the soul out — and then what? Scattered on the wind.

If the soul is immortal, we are going to need a different picture of its nature. The soul is going to have to be made of something other than breath or blood. And it is going to have to have a destiny, a direction, a home that is different from anything material.

The Soul as Kin to the Forms

The key notion in the *Phaedo* is that the soul is somehow connected with the forms — the eternal, unchanging entities we discussed in the previous lecture. The soul is somehow *kin* to the forms, kin to what is deathless, unchanging, eternal, and true. The soul has a place to go after death that is not merely Hades — that mythological underworld of shades and shadows, a place of ghosts. Plato does not want that kind of immortality. He is not talking about ghosts. He is

talking about a soul that belongs among true being, eternal being, in the light — not in the darkness, not in a cave underground.

Because the soul is kin to the forms, its identity and destiny are not situated in this bodily world. The soul is not fundamentally at home in the body. Hence Socrates in this dialogue will say that true philosophy, true philosophizing, means *practicing to die* — because what happens when you die is that your soul gets separated from your body. The soul is not at home in the body; the soul wants to go back where it belongs, which is with the forms. The soul does not want to be among things that die, and the body certainly dies. The soul wants to be with things that are deathless, like the forms. It is more akin to these deathless and eternal things than it is to the mortal, changing, decaying body.

The Body as Prison

So what we have in the *Phaedo* is the origin of a tradition of what one might call **otherworldliness**. The soul is not at home in the bodily world. The soul belongs in a more eternal, deathless, and changeless world. That is what you have to say, I think, in order to maintain a notion of the soul as inherently immortal, because nothing in the changing world of bodies is immortal.

Plato wants us to think of ourselves as not entirely at home in our bodies. He wants us to practice for the separation of soul and body — what he calls a form of **purification**. The soul needs to be purified of its attachment to the body. Consider the implications. If detaching yourself from the body means purification, then the body is in some sense impure — something like a form of dirt. Think of what a body is without a soul: a corpse. And a corpse is as unclean as it gets. People do not like handling corpses. In Judaism and throughout world religions, corpses are considered unclean.

The soul, Plato thinks, wants to be separated from that. If the soul gets too involved in bodily pleasures or in money and other material things — if the soul gets involved in these material things — it gets dirtied by them. It gets *nailed* to the body, Plato will say in the *Phaedo*. The soul becomes something nailed to the body by its pleasures and pains and material interests. The body, Plato will call it, is a **prison** for the soul. The soul does not want to be there. It is not home there. That is why the true philosopher, the true seeker after wisdom, is practicing to die — practicing for the separation of body from soul. The true philosopher is, in a word, an **ascetic**: someone who is disciplining the soul to separate itself from bodily pleasures.

I am stressing this a little one-sidedly, because this is not everything Plato has to say about the soul. But in the *Phaedo* it is the dominant theme, and it really does represent a form of otherworldliness that becomes very important in Neoplatonism and other later religious forms of thought.

Recollection and the Pre-Existence of the Soul

Now, another step in Plato's argument for the immortality of the soul must be added to the mix. Not only is the soul kin to the forms, but the soul comes into the body already possessing some knowledge of the forms. When we come to see the forms in this life — while still in the body — that seeing is like a form of **recollection**.

Think of the experience. Here you are in a mathematics class, trying to understand a proof. You do not get it for a while, but then all of a sudden you get it — you see it. And it seems like something that has always been there. You say to yourself: "How could I miss it? Of course — in a sense I always knew this." You recognize it. It feels a little bit like remembering, Plato thinks. It is like recollecting something you already knew but had forgotten. Because what

happens is the soul gets into the body at birth — an infant body not set up for knowledge — and you forget. Birth is a forgetting, and all learning is a form of **recollection**. In Greek this is *anamnesis*, which means recollection, the opposite of amnesia. All learning is recollection.

This implies, of course, that the soul did not start out in the body. After all, it is not at home there. The soul had an existence prior to coming into the body.

The Myth of Transmigration

There is an early version of this story from Plato's dialogue the *Meno*, which is also referred to in the *Phaedo*. This version involves transmigration — or what many of us would call reincarnation. Our souls were embodied in a previous life, where they could learn about the forms, and then they get re-embodied in our present life, but forget what they knew during childhood and then relearn through education.

But this is somewhat mythological, and in fact it does not really work as an explanation of recollection. Because if every time I catch a glimpse of the true forms — the true being in the true world where the light is really shining — I am really remembering something I learned in a previous life, then how did I learn it in *that* previous life? By recollecting from a life before that? And a life before that? And so on to infinity? No, that does not explain it.

The Myth of the Fall: The Phaedrus

So Plato comes up in another dialogue with a more sophisticated, though equally mythic, explanation. This is the dialogue called the *Phaedrus*. In this dialogue, the soul starts out not embodied in some previous life, but rather **disembodied**. Because after all, the real home of the soul — its real origin — is not among bodies at all. The soul is imprisoned in a body, so the prison cannot be where it

belongs. It belongs in a disembodied state, contemplating heavenly truths.

This is again mythic, like the allegory of the cave. Plato pictures the soul as up in heaven — literally up in heaven — contemplating things that are beyond the heavens. Greek astronomy pictured the heavens as a kind of sphere surrounding the world, and up at the very top of the sphere you could look out beyond the whole physical world, beyond the whole visible world, to what is beyond vision, to what is seen only by the mind's eye. That is where the soul is mythically or metaphorically located at the beginning of its existence — outside the cave, up in that world of light. Being dragged down into the cave and chained up is birth.

The soul, therefore, is not made of material stuff. It is somehow kin to these intelligible forms, which are not material at all. It belongs with them. It feeds on contemplation — on the vision of these forms, intellectual vision, the vision of the mind's eye. Getting into the world of bodies is therefore not natural. Something has to go wrong for the soul to descend into the world of bodies. Birth is, as it were, a **fall**.

In Plato's myth of the fall, the soul is pictured as a **charioteer** with two horses that are rather hard to manage. The soul gets tired, falls down, tumbles, and ends up in bodies where it does not really belong, and must work its way back through a series of transmigrations. The key notion is that the soul starts out outside the body and that its entrance into the body is a fall, a descent — the opposite movement from the ascent out of the cave up to the world of light. The upward movement is toward the disembodied, immaterial, eternal world. The downward movement is the movement of the fall from the eternal world into this changing world of bodies, mortality, and death.

Eros: Love as Recollection and Ascent

This also explains, Plato thinks, why we fall in love. Think about the experience of falling in love — especially the wildness of it, the desire for something ultimate that seems to be part of the experience. Somehow falling in love hints at some ultimate fulfillment that is wildly beyond anything in this world.

Sometimes you think that a particular person in flesh and blood can satisfy that desire, but Plato thinks they cannot, really. The person you fall in love with — especially the physical sight of them — is at best a reminder of what you saw when you were not in the body. Physical beauty is a reminder of eternal beauty. And eternal beauty is, again, the beauty of the forms. Beauty with a capital B is, in fact, another name for the Good with a capital G. The Good is, in one aspect of it, the Beautiful.

What love is, then, is our response to beauty. All love, Plato thinks, is directed at something beautiful. We literally cannot love what is ugly. So when you fall in love, what is happening is that the sight of another person — or perhaps the knowledge of their soul, their character, who they are — is reminding you of eternal beauty. If you are a materialistic sort, maybe it is the sight of someone's body that is reminding you of eternal beauty. But if you are a noble sort, like Socrates, maybe it is the sight of someone's soul.

Socrates would, as it were, seduce young men into talking philosophy with him. He would take them outside the city wall, they would sit under trees, and instead of engaging in what the Greeks often expected in such settings — because noble sexuality in ancient Athens was typically between men, as sex with women was for reproduction and companionship between men was for higher things — Socrates would seduce the young man into talking philosophy. The result would be a perception of the beauty of a soul.

Socrates would perceive the beauty of the young man's soul, his virtues. The young man, in turn, would also fall in love with Socrates. There is a famous portrait of Alcibiades — one of the great black sheep of Athens — falling in love with Socrates. Falling in love with who he *is*. Socrates was not a physically beautiful man; he was, as a matter of fact, rather ugly. But there was something beautiful about his soul, something beautiful about who he was, that reminded people of something eternal.

The virtue of a young man touches your heart, Plato says, because it reminds you of the sight of true virtue that you had before you were ever embodied. Falling in love is this *reminiscence*, this reminder of a true vision of true beauty in the disembodied state.

The Ascent of Love: The Symposium

I have been talking about the descent — the fall — but there is also this ascent, the climbing up, which we saw in the allegory of the cave. It is also in Plato's dialogue the *Symposium*. The word *symposium* originally meant, in Greek, a drinking party — and indeed, the dialogue takes place at a gathering of men talking about love and about what happens when an older man falls in love with a younger man.

Socrates, in that dialogue, tries to convince his companions that what is really happening is they are being reminded of true virtue and true beauty. The noble lover, he argues, gets beyond bodily things — the attraction to a young man's physical form — and ascends to love of the soul, then to love of the city and its just laws. So one is ascending from bodily beauty, to love of the virtues of an individual soul, to love of the city and its just laws and constitution, and finally to love of eternal justice, beauty, and goodness.

This is the original form of what we call **Platonic love**. It was Platonic because it was not fundamentally sexual — and yet it *started* with

something like seduction. Throughout Plato's dialogues, you have Socrates accosting a young man in a way that any Athenian would have found rather suspicious. Off they go outside the city to sit under a tree — in the *Phaedrus*, under a plane tree — and have a private conversation. But they are talking philosophy. Socrates is seducing the young man into love of eternal beauty. Love thereby becomes a means of **ascent**, a means of the soul climbing out of the cave. After all, why do we inquire about the Good? Not because we are told we must, but because we *desire* it, we *long* for it. The whole motive that drives Platonic inquiry — that desire for the deep and true being of things — is a form of love, a form of *eros*. Falling in love, that fundamental bodily and psychological experience, is a recollection of that original vision of eternal beauty, spreading through our whole body and soul.

The Three-Part Soul

Now, one of the things that happens as Plato gets older and writes more is that he starts with a very simple and radical idea — like the soul-body dualism of the *Phaedo* — and then makes it more complicated, because the initial formulation is too simple. The extreme otherworldliness of the *Phaedo* needed to be qualified.

So, for instance, in the *Symposium* he says that the love of bodies is not entirely disconnected from the higher world. It is a reminiscence of eternal beauty. You can start with loving what you see with your physical eyes and ascend from there. Another thing that happens as Plato develops his ideas is that he makes the concept of the soul considerably more complex. In the *Phaedo*, he insists the soul is simple — just one thing, having no parts, and therefore incapable of being scattered on the wind. But in his later works, especially in the

Phaedrus and the *Republic*, he ends up proposing that the soul has three parts.

The Charioteer and Two Horses: The Phaedrus

In the *Phaedrus*, recall, the soul up in heaven is compared to a **charioteer** with two horses. The soul, therefore, has three parts. There is the charioteer, and there are the two horses. One is a good horse, who always obeys what the charioteer wants. The other is an unruly horse, hard to control.

The charioteer represents **reason** — the part of the soul most akin to the forms, and the only part Plato was really concerned with in the *Phaedo*. One horse could be called the **spirited** part of the soul — spirited in the sense of a spirited horse, not in the sense of breath or spirit, but in the sense of courage and noble energy. Think of a war horse: obedient, strong, not as smart as the charioteer, but willing to obey him. This is the courage-driven part of the soul that becomes the key element of a soldier. The other horse is more **lustful** — driven by desires and impulses, going this way and that depending on what it happens to see. This appetitive horse makes it difficult for the charioteer to keep the chariot under control, and eventually the charioteer gets tired, and the fall happens.

Reason, Spirit, and Appetite: The Republic

There is another version of this three-part soul in the *Republic*, where it can be explained a bit more clearly. You have three parts. The highest is the **rational** part of the soul — like the charioteer. Then there is the **spirited** part, a middle part that Plato locates in the chest — he actually uses the word *thumos*. We can think of it as the heart, the soldier part. Indeed, the soldiers in Plato's *Republic* are the ones who are predominantly keyed to this part of the soul. And then there is the **appetitive** part: think of every part of your body below the chest — hunger, desire, appetite, and all those drives which are likely to make you go astray, all those impulses which drive commerce and

business. Plato thinks that people who are driven by commerce are driven by desire, by those needs that come from the chest on down. The majority of people in the world are related to this lowest part of the soul.

At one place in the *Republic*, Plato compares the appetitive part of the soul to a **many-headed beast**, the spirited part to a **lion**, and the rational part to the **man within us** — the inner human being. These three parts of the soul correspond to three classes in the city of the *Republic*: the philosopher-king, who is the rational element of the Republic; the guardians or soldiers, who are the spirited element and who obey the orders of the philosopher-king; and the masses — *hoi polloi*, Greek for "the many" — who have their function. Someone has to grow the food and conduct trade. That is part of the city, just as appetite is part of the soul. But they ought to be obedient to the higher powers.

Conclusion: A More Complex Picture of the Soul

When the higher powers are not in control, things go wrong in the city — and likewise, when desire runs rampant, things go wrong in our souls and in our lives. But notice what has changed between the *Phaedo* and the *Republic*. In the *Republic*, the thing that goes wrong is not simply the body. The source of evil, the source of our problems, is not the body, but the lower — more bodily-oriented — **part of the soul**. That gives us a more complex picture: not just a pure soul and a dirty body, but a soul that is a complex unity, one that needs to be ordered and governed in a certain way, and which sometimes falls into disorder. How that governance is supposed to work is a major theme of the *Republic*.

Lecture 7: Aristotle, Metaphysics

Professor Philip Carey

Introduction: The Greatest Mind

Talk about a great mind. Aristotle would be my candidate for the greatest mind that ever lived. Consider the achievements of this one man. In addition to being the second most important and influential philosopher in the Western tradition after Plato, he also invented the science of logic. Think of that as an achievement. He was not the first person to think logically, but he was the first person to formulate the rules of logic and give it a name. And he did not stop there. He invented physics — that is, he formulated physics as a branch of human inquiry and gave it its name. As I mentioned earlier, he also gave the name to the inquiry called metaphysics. And in a substantial sense, he invented the sciences of zoology and botany as branches of human investigation. He started a whole range of disciplines. His mind was large enough to inaugurate logic as a form of inquiry on the one hand, and botany on the other. It is awesome to read Aristotle — to encounter an intelligence that great.

Aristotle at Plato's Academy

Aristotle was not only the second most influential philosopher after Plato; he was also Plato's student. He came to Plato's Academy as a young man. The Academy is, in fact, the very first thing to be called an academy — except for an olive grove outside of Athens, which was the original site. Plato bought that olive grove and used it as the place of his school, and that is why it is called the Academy.

The greatest student in that first Academy was Aristotle. And it must have been a remarkable place, because Aristotle came into it and

seems from the beginning to have been a critic of Plato's pet theory — the key theory of Plato's metaphysics, the theory of the forms, which we discussed in the previous lecture. There are scholarly disagreements about the history here, but I take the view, along with many other scholars, that Aristotle was a critic of the theory of forms from the start. He was the son of a physician, and he had been raised with an appreciation for inquiry into the physical and natural world. He wanted philosophy to be concerned with those things. He was not so impressed with this otherworldly speculation about eternal entities that you cannot investigate with your hands, eyes, and ears.

Aristotle was looking, in essence, for a theory that would help us understand things that grow and change — things like human bodies, things like the subjects of botany and zoology. His criticism of Plato was that the theory of forms is perhaps wonderful as something to contemplate, but it does not help explain the changing world.

This contrast is captured beautifully in a famous painting — Raphael's *School of Athens* — in which Plato and Aristotle stand together. Plato points upward toward the world of the forms. Aristotle argues with him, his hand pointing forward: *Look out there, Plato — this is what we need to understand. Looking up there doesn't do it. There may be forms up there, but what we need to understand is here. We need a science of changing things, an understanding of how things change and grow.*

Physics: The Science of Moving Things

The word for this science is **physics**. Physics is a word that Aristotle more or less invents as a name for a certain kind of inquiry. It comes from the Greek word *physis*, meaning nature. And a *physis* is a certain kind of thing. When you ask, in Greek, what kind of thing something

is, you ask: what *physis* is it? The root of *physis* is the verb *phuo*, meaning to grow. So you are asking: what kind of growing thing is it? How does it grow? How does it come into being? How does it change? What are the rules and laws of its changing and growing? That is what physics is about — how things move, grow, and change according to their own nature.

It is natural for a stone to fall. It is natural for an animal to grow from infancy to its adult form. It is natural for fire to go upward. It is natural for human beings to reason. What Aristotle wants to understand is how these changes, growths, and movements happen.

Here I need to point to an enlarged sense of the word *movement*. Aristotle's term for movement is a general one that includes all kinds of change and growth. A child growing from childhood to adulthood is, for Aristotle, undergoing a movement in this broad sense. What we would normally call movement — movement through space — Aristotle calls **locomotion**, or local motion, meaning change in place. That is only one kind of motion. Movement, in Aristotle's sense, includes growth and even growth in understanding. So with this broad concept of movement, we can say that physics for Aristotle is the science of movement — a knowledge of processes of change in the natural world. And this is precisely the kind of thing that Plato's forms cannot explain, because the forms are unchanging. The forms might tell us something about eternal structures, but they do not tell us about the changing world.

Aristotle's Critique of Plato: Form Brought Down to Earth

Aristotle's key point is that the forms do not exist separately from the changing world. Plato was wrong about that. Aristotle corrects the theory of forms and insists that forms are not separate from this

changing world — they are **embodied in material things**. That is Aristotle's theory of form, and it is where we must begin in understanding his metaphysics.

Aristotle starts with Plato's theory of forms, criticizes it, and essentially tries to bring the forms down to earth. If we are to understand the changing world, form has to be part of that world. It has to be embodied in matter.

Matter — a word that can also be translated as *material* — is the stuff out of which something is made. As a house is made of wood, the wood is the matter, or material, of the house. So for Aristotle, a natural thing — and all natural things are changing things — is a composite or compound of form and matter. It is something which has a form and is made out of something else.

Consider a wooden house. The wood is its matter, the material out of which it is made. But the house is the form, because the form is what the thing *is*. A pile of wood is not a house. If you say that a house is wood, you have said what its matter is, but you have not said what its form is — you have not told us its structure or its purpose. To say what the house is, you must say not just "wood," but "house." *House* designates a form; *wood* designates matter. By the same token, the form designates the **essence** or nature of a thing. The answer to the question "what is it?" is the form, which Aristotle also calls the essence. The *what it is* is house. The *what it is made of* is wood.

Form, Essence, and the Difference Between Art and Nature

Now, the house is not exactly a natural thing — it is an artificial thing. This is a distinction we get from Aristotle. There are natural things, and there are artificial things. The difference is that natural

things grow — like a baby animal becoming an adult — whereas artificial things are made by an artist. The fundamental contrast is between art and nature.

Aristotle uses the word *art* in its original Greek sense: *technē*. Art does not mean only fine art or beautiful things. It also means the making of useful things, like houses. The house is a product of art, and the carpenter who makes it is, in the literal Greek sense, an artist — or, as we would say, an artisan. The house comes to be through a process governed by an artist, unlike a natural thing for which there is no artist. That is the difference between things made by art and things that grow by nature.

The reason I start with the example of an artificial thing is that it is actually simpler to understand. Nature is more complicated. What Aristotle is doing — and many scholars agree with this — is taking how things work with art and using it as a model for how things happen in nature. In both art and nature, what something *is* is its form, and what it is *made of* is its matter. You and I are made of flesh and bone, but we are not simply flesh and bone. We are *human*. The human is the form. The house is made of wood, but it is not just wood, because a pile of wood is not a house.

It is important to note that the form of the house can exist separately from the house itself — namely, in the mind of the carpenter, like a kind of blueprint in his head. That is the same form, Aristotle thinks, as the form of the completed house. This illuminates a great deal about what form is for Aristotle: it is the thing in the mind of the artist which is also realized in the material. That is what form is — the very same structure that exists in the wood also exists in the artist's conception before building begins.

Form in Living Things: The Soul as Form

Now we can make the great leap from form in artificial things to form in natural things — and especially form in living things, in things that grow. The house comes into being through a process supervised by an artist. A natural thing grows by its own power, through its own internal nature, by an intrinsic principle of growth. That means the form in a natural thing is not in the mind of any external artist. The form is intrinsic and internal to the organism.

Think of a living thing — say, a puppy. It has this form called *dog*. It is a dog. But a dog is not the same thing as what a dog is made of. A dog is not the same thing as flesh and blood. Consider what would happen if the dog died: you would have flesh and blood, but not a living dog. Here we arrive at a crucial notion. When you have a corpse — flesh and blood but no life — what you have is the matter of a living thing, but not its soul, not its essence or form. Aristotle therefore identifies the form of a living thing with its **soul**, its life.

The Greek word *psyche*, which means soul, can also be translated as *life* — and often is, including in the New Testament. The difference between a corpse and a living thing is that the corpse no longer has its *psyche*, its soul, and therefore no longer has its essence. The corpse of a dog is not a dog — it is just flesh and blood, just as a pile of wood is not a house. So the form of a living thing is its soul. Another way of putting it: the dogginess of a dog, the thing that makes a dog a dog, is its soul, which is also its nature. Likewise, the humanness of a human being — the thing that makes you human and not merely a pile of flesh and blood — is your soul. That is your essence and your nature. Human nature is soul. Human nature is essence — the human essence.

Types of Souls

Once again, as so often in Aristotle, we are using a word differently from how we use it in the modern world. For Aristotle, every living thing has a soul, because the soul is simply the life of a thing. So plants have souls. No one in ancient Greece would have been surprised to hear this, because soul simply meant the life of the thing. Plants have souls, but what they do not have is a *rational* soul.

Most of the time today, when we talk about souls, we are thinking of rational souls — immortal souls, those Platonic souls. But for Aristotle, every living thing has a soul, because without soul the body is a corpse. Animals have souls. Plants have souls. Human beings have souls. But they have different kinds of souls.

Only human beings have **rational souls** — souls capable of reason and thought. That is why human beings are defined, by Aristotle, as **rational animals**. Other animals are not rational. My dog is an animal and she has a soul — not an immortal soul, and not a rational soul. She cannot think, reason, or do mathematics. But she can move around. She has what we might call a **locomotive soul**, as all animals do. Plants do not have locomotive souls — they cannot move from place to place. Animals do. My dog is, more precisely, a *brute* or a *beast* — the term for a non-rational animal, one that moves around, perceives, and eats, but cannot perform the higher functions of thinking or understanding in the distinctively rational sense.

So to summarize: plants have **nutritive souls** — they take in nourishment and they grow, but they cannot move from place to place. Animals (brutes) have locomotive souls in addition to nutritive functions — they can move around and eat, but they cannot reason. And human beings are the rational animals — we possess all of these capacities plus the distinctively rational one. Souls are therefore defined by the kinds of activity they are capable of: the capacities for

movement, growth, and change that are inherent in a given kind of living thing.

The Four Causes

At this point we have grasped roughly three-quarters of Aristotle's notion of form. We can now turn to the key formula of his physics — what he calls the **four causes**.

Aristotle's physics, his science of moving things, is organized around these four causes. Two of them we have already discussed: form and matter. The four causes are Aristotle's four modes of explanation. If you want to ask why something is the way it is, you can refer to any of these four explanatory factors. The names — efficient cause, final cause, formal cause, and material cause — were assigned by the later Aristotelian tradition, not by Aristotle himself.

Material Cause

The **material cause** is what something is made of. For a house, that is the wood. For a human being, it is flesh and bone. This is the simplest of the four causes to understand.

Formal Cause

The **formal cause** is what something is — its essence, its structure, its defining nature. The form of the house is *house*; the form of a dog is its dogginess; the form of a human being is its humanity, its rational nature.

Efficient Cause

The **efficient cause** is what the later tradition would call the cause in the narrow modern sense — the thing that makes another thing happen, that brings something into being or sets it in motion. If I throw a ball, I am the efficient cause of the ball's movement. If I am a carpenter building a house, I am the efficient cause of the house. If I

am a parent, I am the efficient cause of my child — I have set that child's growth in motion by begetting the child. The parent is the source of the motion called growth, and through that efficient causation the child inherits its form, its humanity, from the parent. Likewise, the puppy gets the form of dogginess from its parent.

In certain versions of modern materialistic physics, efficient cause is essentially the whole story — everything is explained in terms of cause-and-effect chains. But for Aristotle, efficient cause is only one of four. It is not the whole explanation.

Final Cause

The fourth and perhaps most distinctively Aristotelian cause is the **final cause** — what Aristotle calls the *end*, or technically *that for the sake of which* something happens. The *end* for Aristotle does not mean merely the termination of a process. It means the **completion** of a process or a movement — its goal, its purpose. The completed house is the end of the process of building. The movement of building is aimed toward the complete house. The complete house is the end of that movement, not merely in the sense of where it stops, but most fundamentally in the sense of what the process is *for*.

Likewise, the adult form of an organism — the adult dog — is the end of the process of growth that begins when a puppy is conceived. The adult human being is the end, the goal, of the process of physical growth. The final cause is called final because it designates the end of a process conceived as the goal of that process.

Notice that the final cause is closely connected with the notion of form. The form of the house is the goal toward which the carpenter is working as he builds. The adult form of the dog is the goal of the process of growth. In order to understand a form, you have to understand it as the end of a process — as a goal.

Putting the Four Causes Together

Together, the four causes give a complete explanation of how things change and grow and move. Aristotle believed that previous thinkers had each grasped a part of this picture. Thales said all the world is made of water — he was talking about material cause. Plato talked about form — and that was important, but he neglected efficient and final cause. You have to put it all together, Aristotle thinks, and what you get is physics as he conceives it.

To see how the four causes work together, consider the house: the formal cause is the form *house*, the structure and purpose that defines what a house is; the material cause is the wood; the efficient cause is the carpenter; and the final cause is the purpose — the complete house considered as the goal of the whole process of building. The formal and final causes can overlap very dramatically in Aristotle's scheme.

Likewise, for the process of natural growth: the parent is the efficient cause; the adult form is also the final cause; and the flesh and blood are the material cause. The formal cause is the nature of the creature — its dogginess, or its humanity.

Potentiality and Actuality

One more crucial element of Aristotle's scheme: **potentiality and actuality**. Consider again the relation between child and adult, which is so important for Aristotle's understanding of nature. The child is *potentially* an adult. When you deal with a child, you have to deal with how the child actually is at present, but you also have to deal with the child's potential. It would be terrible to treat a child as if the child would never grow up. Education is treating a child in light of its potential for becoming an adult.

Movement is therefore this process in which the actual is already potentially present. The child is not just a babbling, dawdling creature who understands little — the child is going to become an adult, and you must deal with that child in a way that respects and engages that fact. Movement, in Aristotle's sense, is the process from potential to actual. In some sense, when something is in the process of movement, it has both the potentiality and the actuality within it, and the form is what governs that transition.

The house, when it is being built, is moving toward the complete house. The infant animal is growing toward the adult form. Therefore, the form is already present — but present as *potential*, which is precisely what motivates growth and movement. The puppy is already a dog, but its dogginess is initially there in the mode of potential, orienting its growth.

This same logic extends even to non-living things. A stone falls because the natural place for a stone is down on the earth. Fire goes upward because the natural place for fire is up. There are natural movements all over the world — not just the natural movement of growth from childhood to adulthood, but the natural movements of inanimate objects seeking their proper places.

Teleological Physics

For Aristotle, therefore, the whole world moves according to **final causes** — according to purposes. The whole world is oriented toward achieving forms, toward fulfilling purposes and reaching ends. Movement is always purposeful.

This stands in sharp contrast to modern physics, where things happen because of efficient causes, laws, or formulas — but not, in most cases, for any purpose. For Aristotle, things always move toward an end, if they can. Sometimes they are forced to move

against their nature — a stone thrown upward is moving against its natural direction — but nature eventually takes over and it falls back down. Things head toward their proper end. Things go where they belong.

Aristotle's physics is therefore a **teleological physics** — a physics in which things head toward their *telos*, which is Greek for end or purpose. Things have a purpose in Aristotle's world. It is still a metaphysical world, a world where form and true being determine what things are and what they are to become. But it is not Plato's world. It is not quite so otherworldly. Yet in another sense it is more purposeful — more *meaningful* — than the world of modern physics. Every movement has a purpose, an end, a meaning. That is the difference between Aristotle's world and the world of modern physics.

Lecture 8: Aristotle, Politics

Professor Dennis Dalton

Introduction: Plato's Student and Best Critic

In this lecture on Aristotle's politics, we meet a person who was Plato's student and Plato's best critic. We will be focusing on Aristotle's critique of Plato, because it is the most profound critique that was offered in the tradition of Western political philosophy.

Who was Aristotle? He was born in 384 B.C., forty-four years after Plato. He was born not in Athens but in Macedonia to the north, and he came to Athens at age seventeen to study with Plato at the Academy, where he remained for twenty years. It seems to me remarkable that Plato's student Aristotle should have become not only his most distinguished pupil but also his best critic. That is itself a comment on Plato's ability as a teacher — that he could produce a person of this magnitude. It is sometimes said that Plato is excessively dogmatic or intransigent in his views. But if he were that rigid, he could not have produced someone of Aristotle's worth: a student capable of reflecting on Plato and criticizing him after having studied with him for a full twenty years.

After Plato's death, Aristotle founded his own school right next to Plato's in Athens, called the Lyceum. There he wrote several treatises, but the one we focus on now is called *The Politics*. He wrote *The Politics* not only to refute Plato but also to set forth his own political theory. And it became such an important political theory that it has been said all of us since, in the Western tradition, are either with Plato or with Aristotle — either Platonists or Aristotelians. It is for us to decide which of these two great philosophies we prefer. Our

purpose today is to look at one philosophy against the other — to compare, but above all to contrast.

Observation vs. Speculation: The Empirical Method

The Politics of Aristotle begins with the words, *Observation shows us* — and then Aristotle goes on to argue that through empirical analysis, that is, through the observation of concrete phenomena, we can infer certain facts and conclusions. That is important because observation is a term that does not occur very often in Plato's *Republic*. Plato is concerned with deducing great axioms, as one would as a student of geometry or physics. From Aristotle's point of view, by contrast, one infers ideas as a biologist or chemist would — looking at the human species as a laboratory and understanding it through empirical analysis. It is not for nothing that Aristotle's father was a doctor and that Aristotle studied biology deeply. It was the empirical method used by the biologist that fascinated Aristotle.

Unlike Plato, Aristotle seeks the truth by examining the actual rather than speculating on the ideal. This contrast is magnificently illustrated in Raphael's painting, at the center of which stand Plato and Aristotle. Notice the gesture of each figure. Plato points upward, his finger toward the heavens, as if to say to Aristotle: *The truth lies with the ideals, with the archetypal patterns, with those noble eternal truths of justice, beauty, and goodness that are the abstract reality we must study.* Aristotle's gesture is equally significant. His hand is outstretched, and he looks ahead rather than upward. He surveys the world of reality around him, gesturing at once toward that world of facts and concrete phenomena. I also think that gesture conveys moderation — as if Aristotle is saying to Plato: moderation in all things, the golden mean, is what we must strive to achieve. He seems to be saying: *Cool it, Plato. You have gone to extremes in the Republic.*

Let us think in terms of reality so that we do not take fanatical, extremist steps toward the kind of revolution you propose.

Aristotle believes, then, that the best we can attain is not an otherworldly republic, a utopia, but rather a mean of moderation here on earth. And this mean — this moderate but good life — can be achieved only if we cease building imaginary utopias and concentrate instead on the very practical goal of the right kind of state: one that is attainable, workable, and practical.

The problem with Plato, according to Aristotle, is that he is a revolutionary. He is trying to change the world so that we may attain an impossible dream, a model that can never exist. For all his emphasis on reason — and Plato is certainly identified as a rationalist — Aristotle sees Plato as wholly irrational and unreasonable in the demands for change he sets forth in the *Republic*.

The Three Waves: Aristotle's Response

We want now to examine Aristotle's response in *The Politics* to the three waves of change we reviewed in the lecture on Plato. These three tidal waves of revolutionary transformation were meant to sweep over the old corrupt *polis* and transform it into the republic. Let us examine the arguments Aristotle actually makes, looking directly at his text. One can only wonder whether, during the twenty years Aristotle spent with Plato, this debate actually occurred face to face, or whether Aristotle came to these conclusions only after Plato's death. In any case, political theory is exciting precisely because it contains these debates — this conversation among the greats — and when we look at Aristotle and Plato together, we find them joining issue on vital, vital problems.

The First Wave: Women in Political Life

The first of Plato's revolutionary proposals was that women could rule. This was so extreme that nowhere in the ancient world had anything remotely like it been suggested or approached. In Asia as well as in Greece, women were seen as necessarily belonging to the family and the home — involved only in private life, with no rights of property. Sometimes, of course, women were despised and treated as slaves. Aristotle will not argue that this should be so. He wants women to be respected as faithful wives and good mothers. But when he argues against Plato on this issue, he is arguing against a truly revolutionary step. Remember, Plato had argued in the *Republic* that the nature of women should not disqualify them: just because they are sexually different from men does not mean they cannot be qualified leaders. If women were only given the opportunity to become educated in politics, Plato argued, they could demonstrate their abilities and compete for positions of political power.

Aristotle denied all of this. He asserted, in accord with the conventional wisdom of ancient Greece, that the best place for women is in the home, serving in their natural capacities. Women deserved respect and honor in this function, because it was clearly indispensable for any society to survive. But Aristotle went further and argued that women are *by nature* suited peculiarly for this task — and he finds justification for this argument in his theory of the soul and of human nature.

Since they are by nature suited for this position, they cannot change. Here is what he says specifically in *The Politics*, on the nature of men and women and the nature of the soul:

The soul has naturally two elements, a ruling and a ruled, and each has its different goodness — one belonging to the rational and ruling element and the other to the irrational and ruled. What is true of the soul is evidently also true of the household and the state, and we may

thus conclude that it is a general law that there should be naturally ruling elements and elements naturally ruled. The rule of the free man over the slave is one kind of rule; that of the male over the female is another. The slave is entirely without the faculty of reason. The female possesses the faculty of reason, but in a form which must remain ineffective.

This is her nature, Aristotle says. Her soul has a quality of reason in it, but not a quality that can compare with the male. Men have superior reason — they are superior by nature. Their souls have this stronger element of rationality. Women, by the nature of their souls, are meant to be ruled by men, the superior ruling force in society. This is part of Aristotle's broader discussion of household management — what we would call home economics — in which women have a critical place, but are naturally ruled by the male.

He is fond of quoting a passage from the Greek poet Sophocles: *A modest silence is a woman's crown*. This saying, Aristotle contends, implies a special form of goodness for women — a definite truth, but a truth that does not apply to men. The particular goodness of women is to serve, to be silent, and to perform their capacities in the home — not to mix in politics, and under no circumstances to serve in positions of rule. Plato's suggestion, then, is revolutionary to the extreme, and it characterizes Plato's whole attitude: extremism.

The Second Wave: The Abolition of the Family and Private Property

The second of Plato's waves was to create an extended family of rulers and to abolish, among the ruling class, both the nuclear family and private property. These institutions were not to exist among the ruling elite — the larger communal family would be liberated from narrow family concerns and immune from nepotism and possessiveness.

Aristotle replies, first, that this suggestion is entirely impractical and undesirable. It is undesirable because, from Aristotle's point of view, the family is natural. It is necessary for socializing individuals. It produces values — trust, loyalty, affection — bonds that are vital for the state. The family is one way to socialize individuals on the path toward understanding the larger values of loyalty within the *polis*. We meet the values of loyalty and trust first in the family. We learn responsibility and obligation in the family. For Plato to sweep this away would be to create a state with no values of this kind.

Aristotle continues his refutation of Plato by arguing that if we were to institute the idea of an extended communal family, we would have a group of individuals who are careless in their attitudes toward one another. As he puts it:

What is common to the greatest number always gets the least amount of care. Men pay most attention to what is their own; they care less for what is common. Men are more prone to neglect their duty when they think that another is attending to it.

In this vast extended family, each citizen may have a thousand sons, but those sons will not belong to each citizen individually — any and every son will be equally the son of any and every father, since in Plato's state, fathers and mothers will not know their own children. The result will be that every son will be equally neglected by every father.

Aristotle also speaks eloquently of the spirit of fraternity. This spirit, he says, is likely to exist in the very least degree in Plato's system, precisely when family bonds are loosened:

In Plato's Republic, it would be merely a watery sort of fraternity. A father would be very little disposed to say "mine" of a son, and a son would be as little disposed to say "mine" of a father — just as a little sweet wine, mixed with a great deal of water, necessarily produces a

tasteless mixture. So family feeling is diluted and tasteless when family names have so little meaning as they have in a constitution of the Platonic Republic, and when there is so little reason for a father treating his sons as sons, or a son treating his father as a father, or brothers one another as brothers.

Men care for their family or for their property, he says, when they can truly identify with them as their own.

Aristotle then applies this same logic to Plato's proposal to abolish private property. He attacks this with equal vigor:

We must conclude — whether we are considering family or property — that to think of a thing as your own makes an inexpressible difference. The satisfaction of a natural feeling brings pleasure, and it may well be that regard for oneself, and by extension for what is one's own, is a feeling implanted by nature, not a random impulse. The simple feeling of love for any of these things — family, property, money — is universal.

He adds that a very great pleasure is to be found in doing kindness and giving help to friends, guests, or comrades, and such generosity becomes possible only when property is privately owned. In a state like Plato's, with all property held in common, no man can show himself liberal or perform a liberal act, because the function of liberality consists in the proper use one makes of property.

This is a valuable point: in order to be generous and charitable, you must have property to give away. And Aristotle trusts that people who do own property and accumulate wealth will in fact be generous with it. He does insist that there must be a limit to the accumulation of wealth — it should not become so exorbitant as to be useless. But when you accumulate wealth within reasonable limits, you accumulate the power to be generous and good to society. Allow the institution of private property to continue and flourish, because it is

the material of good feeling, affection, and fraternity — the bonds that family and property together sustain.

The important point, Aristotle is saying, is that Plato is unnatural in his requirements. We like to own things, to possess them, to know them, to give them away. To give all of this up is, from Aristotle's point of view, to become something superhuman or less than human. We must not do that. We must treasure our humanity, and the value of family and property is part of that treasure.

The Third Wave: Concentrated Power and the Rule of Guardians

Plato's third wave was to place all power in the hands of the guardians — the intellectual elite — so that the just state could be constructed. Aristotle attacks this wave with vigor equal to his attack on the previous two.

When we examine Plato's insistence that all power be concentrated in the hands of a few — the rational guardians, those who can rule a state justly — Aristotle sees an element of danger:

He makes one body of persons the permanent rulers of his state, thus rejecting the principle — which I favor — of ruling and being ruled in turn.

This system, Aristotle argues, must breed discontent and dissension in the state. It is important to note how Aristotle, from a practical point of view, says of Plato's supposed revolutionary change that it will breed civil war. Those who do not hold power are bound to revolt against the few who do. And remember, from Plato's point of view, the vast majority of people in the state will have no political power whatsoever. This can only produce immense dissatisfaction.

But Aristotle goes further than that. He argues that there cannot be any happiness at all in Plato's utopia. The majority will be unhappy, obviously, because they have no political power and no say in

government. But the philosophers will also be unhappy, because they are deprived of family and private property — the things that, from Aristotle's point of view, are the real stuff of life. Plato's chosen few, his rational rulers and guardians, cannot have the family bonds or the property that give life its meaning and satisfaction. So Aristotle concludes: if you wanted to construct a state that is universally unhappy, it would be Plato's state. No one — not even those at the top, who are deprived of family and property — will be fulfilled.

Aristotle's Alternative: The Middle Class and the Politics of Moderation

Aristotle therefore proposes his own alternative — a much better state, from his point of view, because it could actually work. It is a state ruled by the middle class. The larger that class, the better.

Later in *The Politics*, Aristotle sets forth his mean of moderation: an ideal state — but unlike Plato's, not an ideal suspended in the heavens somewhere, but one that can be realized in this life. He says:

We want to consider what is the best kind of state and the best way of life for the majority of states and men. We will not employ, as Plato does, a standard of excellence above the reach of ordinary mortals. We shall only be concerned with the sort of life which most men are able to share and the sort of constitution which it is possible for most states to enjoy.

He refers here to his other great work, the *Ethics* — and indeed, *The Ethics* and *The Politics* should be read together, because the *Ethics* enforces the key principle of moderation in all things. If a truly happy life is a life of goodness, and goodness consists in a mean of moderation, it follows that the best way of life for the majority of

men is one which consists in a mean of the kind attainable by every individual.

In all states, Aristotle says, one may distinguish three parts or classes of the citizen body: the very rich, the very poor, and the middle class, which forms the most moderate position between the extremes. As a general principle, moderation and the mean are always best. The middle class is most ready to listen to reason, Aristotle argues, because the middle class has a stake in the system — specifically, a stake in owning property. Those who belong to either extreme — whether the over-wealthy or the over-poor — find it hard to follow the lead of reason.

It is clear from our argument that the best form of political society is one where power is vested in the middle class, and that good government is attainable in those states where there is a large middle class. It is therefore the greatest of blessings for a state that its members should possess a moderate and adequate property. Where some have great possessions and others have nothing at all, the result is either extreme democracy or an unmixed oligarchy.

What Aristotle wants is neither an oligarchy nor a pure democracy, but something in between, which he calls a **polity** — a state ruled by the middle class. How does this differ from the democracy he knew in Athens? In Athens, every male citizen could vote regardless of literacy or property. Aristotle wants to restrict political participation to those who have property and some education. Where the middle class is large, he argues, there is least likelihood of faction and dissension.

Power Dispersed, Not Concentrated

This emphasis on the middle class is vital to Aristotle's theory of power. From Plato's point of view, power must be concentrated

among a few — the most qualified, the rational, the highly educated — and if it is so concentrated, the state can be ruled justly. A just state can be attained only in this way.

From Aristotle's point of view, that concentration will necessarily result in tyranny and despotism. If power is concentrated absolutely, it means absolute corruption. No group of individuals can be trusted with that much power. His very considered and realistic critique of Plato's theory of power rests on this practical assessment: the middle class represents those people who can be trusted with power precisely because power is dispersed among them and not concentrated in the hands of a few.

The contention that absolute power corrupts absolutely is vital to Aristotle, and he is among the earliest to suggest it in countering Plato's argument. He is sometimes seen as the great-granddaddy of capitalism, since he champions the bourgeoisie and the middle class. But I prefer to see him as a philosopher of moderation — his hand outstretched toward the mean, saying to Plato: *Do not go to those extremes. Extremism means fanaticism and dogmatism. Think instead of reason — reason among those of the middle class who can administer the kind of government we both want: a government that will bring about a practical state of justice.*

Lecture 9: Aristotle, Ethics

Professor Philip Carey

Introduction: Aristotle and the Invention of Ethics

Aristotle was, as I have suggested, as great a mind as they come. He invented all sorts of disciplines of human inquiry, including logic and much of what we call biology. He also gave names to disciplines of inquiry which had already existed but had never been systematized until Aristotle got hold of them. He gave us the name *metaphysics* for what Plato was doing with the Forms. He also gave us the notion of *ethics* as inquiry into the good.

If metaphysics is inquiry into true being, then ethics is inquiry into the true good. So metaphysics is to being as ethics is to good. Aristotle's ethics, then, is an inquiry into this question: what is the good? What is the good *for human beings*? And Aristotle emphasizes that point. Just as he wants to take the Platonic Forms and bring them down to earth — as in the famous Raphael painting, where Plato points up and Aristotle points out — likewise, Aristotle wants to bring the good down to earth. He wants to talk about what is the good for human beings. He is not interested in that vision of the Good outside the cave, up there in some heavenly, otherworldly vision. He wants to know what is the good that human action can obtain.

The Good as an End

When Aristotle talks about the good, he is, as so often in Greek thought, using a familiar word in a rather different way than we are accustomed to. For Aristotle, every good has the character of an *end* in his sense of final cause — a purpose. Whenever you are trying to

do something, you are trying to achieve some good. If you are building a house, the good toward which you are aiming is a house. If you are looking for food, the good for which you are looking is food. And you are always looking for something good: you want good food, not bad food; you want to build a good house, not a bad house. So the end of every process has the character of a good — what we want out of that process is a good version of its end.

The good for Aristotle, then, has the character of an end: that for the sake of which we do something. So the question *what is the good for human beings?* boils down to the question *what is the end — the goal or purpose — of human life?* What is our good? What are we aiming for simply by virtue of being human?

Happiness as the Final End

In one sense, this question is fairly easy to answer. In one of his early works, Aristotle says: don't we all want to be happy? Isn't it obvious? Isn't it necessary? Everyone wants to be happy. Happiness is an end that we aim for — it is the goal of many of the processes we engage in. And not only is it an end; it is the *final* end, the last end. Once you are happy, you are not looking for anything else. You look for food, or a house, or any of these other things in order to be happy. So happiness is a word that designates the end you get to and want for its own sake. It is not a means; it is an end. Once you are there, you have got what you want, and you do not want it for the sake of something else — you want it for its own sake. That is happiness.

However, the word *happiness* does not mean for Aristotle quite the same thing it means for us. Our word happiness translates the Greek word *eudaimonia*, which does not necessarily designate a feeling. For most of us in the twenty-first century, happiness designates a feeling — when we say "I am happy," we mean "I feel happy." For Aristotle

and for Greek language in general, the word designated something more like *success*. Think of success when Aristotle talks about happiness. What makes a life a real success? That is another way of saying: this is what we want when we want something for its own sake, not as a means to some other end. Another possible translation is *human flourishing*. What is a human life that is truly successful? What is a human life that is really flourishing? That is what happiness is.

Now, happiness may be a feeling. It may be that a successful human life is a life that feels good. That was the answer given by philosophers known as **hedonists**. Hedonist is a technical term — it does not mean people who live a wild life. It means philosophers who think that happiness consists in pleasure, that happiness is a pleasant feeling. The Greek word for pleasure is *hedone*, from which we get the word hedonist. So a hedonist is a philosopher who thinks that the goal of human life is to feel good.

That is not an obvious answer to the question of what the goal of human life is — not even an obvious answer to the question of what happiness is, at least not if happiness means what Aristotle means by it, or what all the Greeks meant by it. Happiness is success in human life. Perhaps, if the hedonists are right, success in human life means feeling good. But perhaps it means something else as well. And that is the big issue.

So we have, in effect, marched through three questions: what is the good for human beings? — which translates into: what is the end or purpose of human life? — which becomes: what is happiness? These are the questions that all philosophers after Aristotle agreed are the key questions for ethics. What is the good? What is the end? What is happiness? We know that happiness is the end of human life — everyone agrees on that. But *what is* happiness? That is where the disagreements start. The hedonist says happiness is feeling good. But

there are other possible answers, and Aristotle, like Plato and many others, is interested in giving a non-hedonistic answer to the question: what is the good for human life?

Human Nature as Teleological

If we have a good or end for human life that is other than merely feeling good, then that means that simply because of our human nature — *nature*, that key Aristotelian word — simply because of our human form and human essence, we have a built-in goal. There is an end of human nature, a goal that we have simply because we are human. It is not the same thing as any goal that we might choose. We can choose all sorts of goals that might make us miserable — imagine someone who is addicted, who craves things that make him wretched. To say that we have an end or goal is not the same thing as to say that we choose that end or goal.

Aristotle is interested in what is the intrinsic, objective goal of human nature. Not a goal that we happen to choose — we might happen to choose what will make us really happy, and that would be wonderful, but sometimes we choose things that make us unhappy. So what makes us happy is not something we choose; it is something intrinsic to human nature. Human nature is a *teleological* thing — it has its own built-in goal. Like the process of physical growth, a human child has the built-in goal of becoming an adult. The child may choose toward that goal or may choose against it; the child may even try to do things that stunt its growth. But the goal of becoming an adult is built into the child's physical nature.

So Aristotle is asking: what kind of goal is built into our nature as *rational* animals? The goal of growing up is built into our nature as animals — it is a goal we share with dogs and cats and horses, and it is a real goal of human nature. But it is not a *distinctive* goal of

human nature. The distinctive goal of human nature must be the goal associated with our being rational animals — our fulfillment as rational creatures.

What, then, is that goal? That is the track Aristotle is following in his inquiry into ethics. Before we get to the answer, let us think a little more about the notion of a built-in end.

What do we have as examples of built-in goals? I have mentioned the natural process of growth toward adulthood. Now let us turn to an art, an artful or artificial process. Think about flute playing. That has a built-in goal. A flute player, *as flute player*, has a goal: to play the flute well, to live the life of a flute player who is good at this art. Aristotle thinks there is something analogous in human nature as such. Simply because we are human, there are certain things we need to be good at in order to be happy. We have to be good at being human. And there is such a thing as being good at being human, just as there is such a thing as being good at playing the flute.

Virtue as Human Excellence

The name for being good at being human is **virtue** — the Greek word *arete*, which can also be translated as *excellence*. Virtue is the same thing as human excellence. Virtue means being excellent at being human, just as skill in playing the flute means being excellent at flute playing.

You can see what Aristotle has done: he has connected the notion of the good to the notion of an end in his physics, then to the notion of happiness, and now to the notion of virtue — a common Greek term. The Sophists, Socrates, and Plato were all arguing about this question: what is virtue? What is it to be an excellent human being?

What does human excellence consist in? And so Aristotle now moves to that very question.

At this point, Aristotle can give us at least a definition of happiness, which will be the key definition in ethics:

Happiness is the activity of the rational soul in accordance with virtue.

Happiness means doing what an excellent human being does. So now we need to find out what human excellence consists in — that is, we need to inquire into the nature of virtue.

Virtue as Habit Acquired by Practice

First, we will look at virtue in general, and then at specific virtues. For Aristotle, a virtue is a good state of the soul — analogous to health, which is a good state of the body. You have to have some name for what is happening when a body is doing its work well, and that is health. Likewise, virtue is our name for what is happening when a soul is doing its work well, and in particular when a *rational* soul is doing its work well. Aristotle classifies it as a **habit** — a habitual state, meaning a learned capacity to do certain things well. Flute playing and all other skills are habits in this broad Aristotelian sense: not something we are always doing, but a stable capacity we possess even when we are not exercising it. The flute player has her skill twenty-four hours a day, even when she is sleeping. But when she is playing the flute, she is exercising that habit, involved in the activity — not merely the habit — of flute playing.

And remember, Aristotle defined happiness as the *activity* of a rational soul in accordance with virtue. So the activity, the exercise of virtue, is what happiness consists in.

Now here comes another key point: like other habits and skills, virtue is acquired by practice. It is learned by habituation, just like flute playing. Think about how this works. You start out wanting to be a flute player but not yet being one. This is what Aristotle calls a motion — a movement from potential to actual. You begin not knowing how to do it, but you do it anyway. You do it badly at first, but as you practice more and more, you get better. Eventually you have the skill; now when you play the flute you play it well, and not only well but easily. You enjoy it far more than you did the first time you tried.

Acquiring a virtue is like acquiring a skill in exactly this way. How do you acquire the virtue of courage? You do courageous things even if you do not feel like it, even if you are not good at it yet. Like a soldier facing battle for the first time — he practices the act of courage. As he practices more, he gets better at it, and courageous acts come more easily, just as flute playing comes more easily once you have the skill. They come easier, and you take pleasure in them. A courageous person takes pleasure in acts of courage. A just person takes pleasure in acts of justice. Because virtue, Aristotle says, is about how we relate to pleasures and pains. We take pleasure in the right things if we are virtuous, and in the wrong things if we are vicious — just as a skillful flute player takes pleasure in playing the flute. But that is not where we start; we have to acquire the habit, the virtue, first. And you start simply by practicing, even by doing it badly. As you get better, the activity becomes easier and becomes, as we might say, second nature.

It is also worth distinguishing the habit from natural capacities. The ability to reason is natural — simply by growing up, we will learn something about reasoning. Walking is a natural ability. But flute playing is not natural in that sense; it is not inborn, and you have to acquire it. In that sense it is artificial, an art. But in another sense,

these skills are natural to us because they make use of our natural abilities. We are not born as flute players, but we can use our natural dexterity to learn to become flute players. Likewise, virtue is in a certain sense natural to us, because it is the perfection and excellence most appropriate to a human being. It becomes second nature. And in another sense it is natural in that it is the good state that befits our soul, as health befits a healthy body.

The Four Cardinal Virtues

Now let us talk about virtues in the plural. Aristotle wants to say that virtue in general is a **mean between two extremes**, and we can illustrate this with the first virtue he discusses: courage.

Courage is a mean between the extreme of **rashness** on one hand and **cowardice** on the other. In all the virtues, what happens is that you exercise intelligent judgment to find the mean between two extremes — to do the right thing rather than going to wild extremes in either direction. A courageous soldier does not run away from battle, but he also does not run toward the enemy simply to get himself killed for no reason. He is neither rash nor cowardly. He is in the middle. And in every particular situation, it takes intelligence and judgment to find the right place in the middle. You need to know when you should charge a machine gun emplacement and when you should not. The courageous person is not the one who always charges into machine gun fire — he is the one who knows when to do it and how to do it in ways that will be successful.

Courage is often paired with the virtue of **temperance**, because courage has to do with how we deal with pain and fearful things, while temperance has to do with how we deal with pleasure and desirable things — especially bodily pleasures. The temperate person eats, drinks, and deals with sex in the moderate and appropriate way:

neither self-indulgent nor insensitive, neither excessive nor completely cut off from the enjoyment of food, drink, and even sex. A mature person deals with all bodily pleasures in the right, moderate, temperate sort of way.

So courage and temperance are, in a sense, mirror opposites of one another: courage is about how to deal with pain and fearful things, while temperance is about how to deal with pleasure and attractive things.

The third virtue is **justice**, the key political and social virtue. For Aristotle, justice centers on what he called *distributive justice* — giving people what they deserve, what you owe them. *To each his own* or *to each his due* is the usual Greek definition, and Aristotle basically approves of it. Justice means that everybody gets what they deserve. A just person has the habit of knowing what to give to people: respect to those who deserve respect, money to those you owe money to, and so on through all the relationships of give and take. Not giving too much, not giving things to the wrong people at the wrong time, not taking what is not yours. Theft is a form of injustice. Justice means that all the social relationships of give and take are working out rightly, and that you yourself know in any particular situation what the right thing to do is.

The fourth virtue of the four cardinal virtues is **practical wisdom** — the kind of intelligence you must have in order to know when to charge the machine gun emplacement and when to retreat. A courageous person will sometimes retreat, because if the enemy has superior force and attacking will simply mean your death, then attacking is not courage — it is rashness and foolishness simultaneously. So in all of the virtues, practical wisdom plays a part. You cannot have any virtue without it. You cannot be courageous unless you know the difference between rashness and cowardice in any particular situation.

The example I love to give of this is Captain Miller in the film *Saving Private Ryan* — the captain whose men love him because he has not only courage but intelligence. He knows when to attack and when to retreat. He will not send his men into danger for no reason. They will follow him into danger precisely because they admire his virtues of both courage and practical wisdom. He is a smart man, and that is not an accident — it is essential to the kind of courage he possesses. Any captain you follow into battle must have not only courage but practical intelligence. In fact, he cannot truly have courage without it. If all he has is guts, his guts will lead his forces to their deaths, and you do not want that.

Practical wisdom is the intelligence to make the right decision in the right situation. So all of the virtues are about making practical decisions in particular situations, and all of them require that kind of intelligence. For Aristotle, virtue is not a matter of following rules. There are rules of thumb, certainly, but virtue is not about applying the right law in the right situation — because in any particular situation, there may be more than one rule that applies. *Be courageous. Fight the enemy bravely.* But also: *Don't be stupid. Retreat when you must.* Both principles apply across all sorts of situations. You have to judge which to act on when. All situations are particular, and practical wisdom is the skill, the judgment, to make the right decision at the right time and in the right place.

A useful analogy is a basketball player. Michael Jordan has to decide whether to shoot or to pass. He knows which to do because he has practical basketball intelligence — but that intelligence is totally inseparable from his other skills. You cannot have the smarts without the skills, and you cannot have the skills without the smarts. Intelligence, then, is a crucial part of the moral life. You cannot be a virtuous person if you are foolish. Foolishness here does not mean a low IQ — it is a morally loaded term, as it is throughout both ancient

Greek ethics and the Bible. A foolish person is not a virtuous person. A captain must have good judgment, must know what to do. A basketball player who does not know when to shoot and when to pass is foolish about basketball. And a human being who does not know what decision to make in a crucial situation is simply not good at being human. The practical intelligence of knowing what to do in a particular situation is part of virtue because it is part of being excellent at being human.

Friendship, Politics, and the Good Life

Aristotle's ethics is concerned with social life in two crucial ways.

The largest section of his book on ethics — the longest discussion — is devoted to the topic of **friendship**. It is remarkable that a book on ethics spends more time on friendship than on any other single topic. The reason is that Aristotle believes a virtuous person needs friends. Who would choose to live without them? As Aristotle asks at one point: who would want to have the whole world and yet be entirely alone? The virtuous person, the happy person, the person who is good at being human, will seek out friends for quite a number of reasons.

Friends do good for one another. True friendship should be based on virtue — you want a good person as your friend, not a bad one. True friendship is a friendship among good people who are not merely using each other for private advantage, but genuinely want to do good to each other. You seek out a friend so that you can do good for that friend and the friend can do good for you. The friend also helps you understand who you are. The friend assists you in the task of practical wisdom and virtue. As Aristotle famously says, a friend is a *second self* — an *alter ego*, another I. In the friend I have a self who mirrors me, in whom I can come to understand myself, someone who

wants to be good to me so that I can be good to this person in return.

Evil people do not make good friends, because if you are friends with an evil person, you may be required to do bad things in order to cover up their wrongdoing. Good people never put you in that position. That is why true friendship is based on virtue — you will never have to do something bad in order to cover up the acts of a good person who is your friend.

Finally, at the end of the *Ethics*, Aristotle turns to politics. Politics, it turns out, is the overarching science or discipline that deals with the human good. Ethics is primarily concerned with what happens in individual souls. Politics is concerned with how you bring a whole community of human beings together and enable them to live well. Politics has to be the overarching discipline — it is about how you organize a community of human beings so that they can live well together.

The crucial requirement for this is that they must be **virtuous**. They must be good to one another, not bad to one another. And virtuous people are good to one another. So the crucial task of politics, it turns out, is to make laws that will help people become virtuous. For Aristotle, politics is all about legislating morality — but not in the sense of dictating what people must do in every situation, since that is not how morality works for Aristotle. Ethics does not consist in following rules. Rather, in politics you legislate in such a way as to form people as virtuous people. The point of laws is not to tell people what to do in every situation, but to help them become the right sort of person — virtuous people, people who are good at being human. That is what politics is for. And that is what human life is for: to be good at being human, in a community where friendship among good people is possible.

Lecture 10: Stoicism and Epicureanism

Professor Jeremy Adams

Introduction: The Historical Context of Athens

Epicureanism and Stoicism both arose in Athens in the fourth century BCE. They arose as reasonable responses to the geopolitical condition of that city. Athens had been, of course, the city-state that served as the capital of a tremendously rich and arrogant empire — apparently invincible, at least for the two generations that it held sway over the commerce and territory of the eastern Mediterranean world. Athens had also become, in the course of its imperial dominance, the center of philosophical speculation. This process began in 494 BCE, when the Persians destroyed the Athenian colony of Miletus on the Ionian coast, and most of the Milesians who could escape made their way to the mother city.

By 338 BCE, however, Athens had been twice defeated in major and consequential conflicts. By 400 BCE, after an exhausting two-generation-long war generally known as the Peloponnesian War, Athens had been defeated by the rival city-state of Sparta — a state that was formally allied with the Persian Empire. Then, in 338 BCE, Athens and its allies had to admit defeat by the large and expanding kingdom of Macedonia, led by its hereditary king, Philip II. Although Philip allowed Athens to retain its independence out of respect for its cultural preeminence, Athens was compelled to accept a subordinate position relative to this new type of more powerful state.

Philip's son, Alexander the Great, established an incredible empire in southeastern Europe, western Asia, and northeastern Africa, which broke up after his death in the city of Babylon in 323 BCE. It broke up finally into three very large polyglot empires, and it was perfectly

clear by the year 300 BCE that the era of the Athenian-sized city-state was over. Its day was done.

When the Romans in time — and especially in the second and first centuries BCE — brought the eastern Mediterranean basin under their imperial control by defeating the kingdoms of the descendants of Alexander's generals, they enthusiastically adopted both Epicureanism and Stoicism.

Epicurus and the Foundations of Epicureanism

Epicureanism was named for its founder Epicurus, a prolific writer and an Athenian citizen of elevated social status. He was born in 341 BCE, three years before Athens' defeat by the Macedonians, and he died some seventy years later in 270 BCE. Epicurus' largest book was a discussion of nature, but happiness and ethical salvation were the primary concerns of the school he founded.

Following the fifth-century philosopher Democritus, Epicurus taught that the world is eternal and composed of atoms, which produce everything through their infinitely variable combinations. Each human being is so composed, and therefore we dissolve entirely after the death of the body. There is no afterlife for humans in any sense.

Epicurus was not an atheist, however. He believed that there were gods — long-lived beings of such distant refinement that human lives could mean nothing to them, and to whom it was therefore obviously hopeless to pray, or to build temples, or to dedicate cities. Human happiness must be found, therefore, in this life.

To achieve it, Epicurus recommended withdrawal from public life — a recommendation that would have horrified Plato, and Aristotle even more so. One should also withdraw from sexual involvement, from

the desire for fame (which was generally thought in ancient society to be a rather lofty kind of goal), and from the desire for material goods (less lofty to be sure, though certainly quite widespread). In such a condition of disciplined withdrawal, which he called *ataraxia*, Epicurus taught that one might find maximum pleasure and minimum pain. One might — but one might not, in which case he has little advice to offer.

Epicurus' elevated doctrines appealed to idealistic, cultivated men and women of a world ruled by frantically competitive tyrants. Epicurean societies were founded in many Hellenistic cities and also in the Roman cities that followed them. The adherents of these Epicurean societies were cultivated men and women who treasured letters of advice from Epicurus himself. These letters of advice were called *epistolai*, and the habit of writing epistles about matters of spiritual and philosophical import was a very old habit by the time the Apostle Paul took it up. Here, early Christianity plugs right into a pre-existing mode of communication. The thought that Christianity owes much to Epicureanism would not commend itself to many teachers of Christian doctrine, but this represents a kind of fact in terms of the medium that has carried a very different message. Media can carry very different messages indeed.

Epicurus himself came to be seen as almost a kind of savior figure — rather like Orpheus, the highly mythical figure said to have achieved wonders with his music. Epicurus was seen in that same light, except by a more restrained, disciplined, and understated sort of clientele.

The Decline and Diffusion of Epicureanism

It is no surprise that many Epicureans settled for a much less elevated, much less ascetic version of the master's doctrine, and cultivated instead lives of refined intellectual and sensual pleasure,

avoiding politics as far as possible. Not surprisingly, the degree of refinement tended to decline over time, and eventually there emerged in the late Roman Empire — possibly in Hellenistic cities even before Roman takeover — the kind of Epicureanism that is widespread in American vernacular English today. The luxury food and wine shop of Neiman Marcus is called the Epicure Shop, and it is likely that Epicurus himself would have considered it somewhat over the top, and certainly not conducive to the kind of pleasure he proposed.

One should appreciate magnificent food, but never become sated or gluttonous. One should appreciate magnificent wine, but never get drunk. One should, if possible, have no sexual involvement at all, and if that were not possible, then certainly restrain oneself and try not to beget children into this deeply disappointing world.

That version of Epicureanism has, of course, gone much further still — all the way to the point that Hugh Hefner claimed to be an Epicurean in his *Playboy Philosophy*, a truly remarkable collection of statements which the author, at least, thought deserved the title of philosophy. One might well wonder what Epicurus would have made of it.

Lucretius and Roman Epicureanism

The leading Roman Epicurean thinker and writer was Lucretius, who was born in 99 BCE and died in 55 BCE — traditionally the very year that Virgil put on the *toga virilis*, that is, became a man eligible to vote at age seventeen. Lucretius thus lived a much shorter life than many of our philosophical figures. It is worth noting how many of these philosophers enjoyed remarkably long lives — a fact taken in the ancient world as most unusual, given the demographics and general state of epidemiology of the time. Long life was generally

seen as a sign that philosophy was a good thing, that if you pursued philosophy, you might last considerably longer than those who succumbed to passion and risked their spirits as well as their material existence in doing so.

Even though he died in his forties, Lucretius wrote a very successful book. His most famous and central work is a long didactic poem in six books called *De Rerum Natura — On the Nature of Things*. It devised a new philosophical vocabulary for the Latin language, a work whose completion was taken up by Lucretius' longer-lived contemporary Cicero, who lived another twelve years and died in 43 BCE. Lucretius and Cicero could certainly read Greek, and many of the most cultivated Romans could as well, but they desired to translate this *philosophia* into their own language so that it would be more accessible — accessible at least to the literate members of Roman society, perhaps the upper five to ten percent of the population.

Lucretius repeats Epicurus' teachings, and to some extent reinterprets them — particularly, I think, his scientific teachings. The theological teachings of Epicurus are certainly extended in Lucretius, who is very clearly an atheist, although he will entertain the notion that something called gods might exist, while arguing that this is extremely uncertain and that they do us no good in any case. He was very much concerned with ethical doctrine, which I think mattered more to him in many ways than his scientific reasoning. Lucretius appeals to the innate goodness of mortal human beings who have been corrupted by ignorance and by the savage atrocities of religion.

His sense of these matters did not convince all of his numerous readers, who admired the style of *On the Nature of Things* if not always its content. Saint Augustine, for example, in *The City of God*, gives us no sign whatever of any philosophical influence of Lucretius, though many scholars suspect they can detect Lucretius' style

beneath the magnificent prose that Augustine summoned up for that work, written for what was surviving of the pagan elite in the fifth century CE.

A moderate Epicureanism very probably became, in the minds of various historians, the favorite philosophy of the Roman Empire's upper classes, even if only in a somewhat clandestine fashion. Epicureanism has never really been approved of by establishment states or establishment religions, but it has survived very well nonetheless. It had many medieval Christian adherents — *Christian* perhaps deserving quotation marks. One thinks, for example, of the Franklin in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*: a very pleasant man who lives very well, who is gracious to everybody, who is a master of hospitality. Everyone comes to his table, and he takes care to offend no one. He has no particular ambitions in the political world. He is an Epicurean to the core, even though he is going on a pilgrimage to the shrine of a saint at Canterbury, as all decent people do from time to time. And one can see this kind of lifestyle, wedded to a largely unstated disbelief in most of the structures of official religion, as a continuing theme in Western thought.

Lucretius remained favorite reading for gentlemen of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment. His Latin poetry is quite remarkable, and it became a sort of advanced schoolbook, continued to be read by many gentlemen returning to their country estates or provincial cities as dealing with the problems of that age. Many of his tenets were revived by the utilitarian philosophers of the later eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and in a sense Epicureanism lives on today — not simply in its more vulgar and sensually oriented forms.

Zeno and the Origins of Stoicism

Stoicism arose as a critical response to Epicureanism and also to skepticism, another contemporary philosophical movement. The founder of Stoicism was a very different person from Epicurus. He was not an Athenian citizen, not particularly upper class, and not even a Greek. He came from a Phoenician colony on the island of Cyprus — the colony of Kition. He was born probably in the year 320 BCE, just a few years after the death of Alexander the Great, and some twenty years after Epicurus, making him a younger contemporary who consciously took on Epicurus in his teaching.

His school — it is hard to call it a school exactly, since Zeno refused to have one in any formal sense — gathered in the *agora*, the public meeting place of Athens. He taught particularly in a great public portico decorated with famous mural paintings, known as the *Stoa Poikilē*, the Painted Stoa. From this favorite place of meeting, the Stoic school took its name. Zeno preferred unstructured dialogues in the style of Socrates, whom he greatly admired, and he was constantly attacking the dominant schools of thought — Platonism, Aristotelianism, Epicureanism, and skepticism — by confronting them with moral and logical paradoxes.

Although in his personal style Zeno advocated a return to Socrates, he shared the Epicurean assumption that reality was essentially material. This is, I think, one of the hardest points to grasp about Stoicism. Although it seems to be a highly spiritual doctrine — one that emphasizes moral conditions, moral realities, and moral duties — Zeno was convinced that nature was material. In that sense, he carried on some of the atomistic theory of Democritus. He did not adopt all of Democritus' theory of the constitution of matter, nor certainly the moral consequences that emerged from Democritean and atomistic thought, which was probably atheistic. But he did

believe that reality was material, which makes Stoicism a surprising philosophy in many ways.

We should remember, however, that Zeno is a master of paradox. Stoicism is the philosophy of paradox. Some say that among world religions, Christianity has accepted paradox with more delight — has reveled in it more thoroughly — than even Buddhism or Confucianism. If that is so, it may help explain why, of all the later Greek philosophies, Stoicism was the one most readily accepted by Christianity, even before it achieved legal recognition in the Roman Empire.

Stoic Ethics: Apatheia and Natural Law

Even though Zeno and his followers were convinced of the material constitution of reality, they were committed primarily to finding useful answers to the everyday moral problems of ordinary people. Instead of the elite Epicurean *ataraxia* — that elite ideal of disciplined withdrawal — the Stoics proposed the ideal of *apatheia*, the etymological ancestor of the English word apathy, but about as different from modern English apathy as one can imagine. *Apatheia* means freedom from *pathos*, freedom from suffering — and also freedom from the kind of suffering that is passion, freedom from the passionate temperament and from passionate behavior. The social consequences of *apatheia* were anything but the modern English sense of apathy: the Stoics insisted strongly on one's duty to one's community and one's fellow human beings.

Zeno wrote a *Republic*, which does not survive in full but is known to us through fairly good descriptions and fragments. It was a republic considerably more radical than Plato's. In that visionary work, Zeno declared that all who recognize the spark of divine reason within themselves must acknowledge the sway of natural virtue — a kind of

virtue which everywhere obeys the dictates of universal justice. If enough people were ever to do so, the human race might be able to advance toward the government of a worldwide city-state, a *cosmopolis*, a *polis* of the entire cosmos, ruled by natural law. In such a polity — such a cosmopolitan realm of justice — all human beings would be brothers, enjoying a form of civic happiness free of convention and free of the divisions falsely introduced by such things as family bonds, schools and loyalty thereto, temples dedicated to one or another god, law courts, military ambition, and money.

Here we have a remarkable image of a cosmopolitan society that is disinterested in most of the things we tend to consider signs of cosmopolitan culture — a fascinating ideal that appealed very strongly to the Romans.

Cicero and Roman Stoicism

Cicero is, I think, the most striking proponent of Stoicism in the world of Roman thought. He was born in 106 BCE and died in 43 BCE, assassinated by the agents of Mark Antony as a consequence of one of the Roman civil wars. Cicero was himself an eclectic in philosophy — he liked to draw philosophical beliefs from various schools. He was very strongly attracted by skepticism until he realized what the moral consequences of skepticism had to be, and so he moved toward Stoicism. We know that when he was in his late twenties, he heard the lectures of a man named Antiochus of Ascalon at Athens, who was attempting to restore the tradition of Stoicism in the first century BCE, and Cicero gave him serious hearing.

Many Romans found Stoicism the most acceptable current Greek philosophy, at least partly because of its respect for disciplined military valor and also for its sense of a worldwide law. The Romans were setting up a world state, and they rather liked the idea that

what they might be doing was preparing for the *cosmopolis*. The Romans were always concerned about the fundamental morality of their actions — one is aware, I assume, that the Roman Republic and the Roman Empire never officially fought an aggressive war. Every war those masters of warfare fought was declared a defensive action by the Roman Senate before it got underway. We can look at the Romans as among the most ruthless exploiters of military talent, but the Romans themselves were troubled by this image and wanted everything they did to be moral and just. If the long-range goal of all these wars — in which much blood was shed, many slaves were captured, and much wealth was taken back to Rome — was some philosophical ideal state, a *cosmopolis* free of attachment to family bonds, schools, military ambition, law courts, and money, then this could stand as a fine justification for what the Romans were doing. Obviously, this kind of idea lies behind the Roman Christian ideal of the City of God, and behind more modern ideas of one-world government, which has certainly not come anywhere near realization at this point. So Stoicism remains a fresh philosophy, at least as regards its greatest political prescription: the *cosmopolis* of Zeno's *Republic*.

Cicero came to prominence from somewhere between Epicurus' aristocratic background and Zeno's non-Greek and apparently middle-class origins. He was what was called a *novus homo*, a new man — meaning he was not a scion of the old Roman nobility. He was from a very fine family in the Volscian region southeast of Rome, in the area of Campania, and his family claimed descent from the Volscian kings, which is entirely plausible, though they were certainly not of old Latin blood. Cicero's father was wealthy, however, and paid for an excellent education, sending Cicero to Athens, Rhodes, and other places in the eastern world. He came back a lawyer, rose to become consul — the chief executive of the Roman state — and was especially interested in the Stoic conception of natural law, which

several of his works transmitted to medieval and modern Western thought.

Seneca

Seneca was a native of the patrician Roman colony of Córdoba in Spain, born in 4 BCE and dying in the year 65 CE, committing suicide in his bathtub in response to commands from the Emperor Nero to do so. Seneca's uncle was a very famous orator and lawyer whose books on legally effective rhetoric continued to be read throughout the Middle Ages and even into the modern period. Seneca himself came to Rome with money, means, and ambition, and made for himself quite a reputation and quite a considerable fortune. Unfortunately, from the point of view of those who take Stoicism very seriously, Seneca made most of his money from tax speculation — lending money at staggering rates of interest on the expectation that the borrower would profit enough from tax futures to be able to repay him. He may, in fact, have had a hand in this indirect way in the tragic rebellion of the British queen Boudica against the Roman occupation of Britain under the Emperor Claudius.

Seneca had been appointed tutor to the young man who became the Emperor Nero, and he attempted to teach him philosophy and Greek — probably including the use of the Greek language for elevated kinds of statements. He did not succeed very well in teaching Nero how to be a Stoic, to put it mildly. He wrote a great deal: prose treatises of a philosophical character, disguised as formal letters to a friend, which would grow into full treatises on subjects such as clemency, tranquility, or how to endure misfortune in a cruel world. He also composed dramas, not so much for stage presentation as for recitation — it is not at all clear that any of his dramas were ever actually performed on stage until the late Middle

Ages and the Renaissance. Hamlet, famously, is very much in favor of various of Seneca's plays, and they clearly became part of the theatrical side of Renaissance education. Both types of work — the dramas and the letters — circulated throughout the empire even during Seneca's own lifetime and remained favorite items of school reading for eighteen centuries.

As his pupil Nero turned against his advice, Seneca stoically endured the danger of not complying with his pupil's preferences, and then committed suicide with dignity — an entirely honorable act in the ancient world, and particularly within the orbit of Stoic thought.

Marcus Aurelius

Probably the most impressive of the Roman Stoics, at least in terms of rank, is the Emperor Marcus Aurelius. He was born around 120 CE and died in the year 180, apparently one of the first victims of the bubonic plague, which had just come out of India and was beginning to ravage Europe. The bubonic plague — known in its later medieval reappearance in the fourteenth century as the Black Death — was a terrifying disease which at least dispatched its victims within just a few days. We are told that Marcus Aurelius met his end stoically. In fact, he did everything stoically, as far as we can tell.

He was trained as a young man to be a philosopher-king in something like Plato's ideal, ruling over something very like a *cosmopolis*. One can see that he harbored the thought that it would be good for rulers like himself to turn the Roman Empire into a genuinely Stoic cosmopolis. Unfortunately, reality meant that he had to spend almost all of his fourteen-year reign — he was emperor from 166 to 180 — on the river Danube, campaigning against the incursions of Germanic peoples with evocative names such as the Quadi and the Marcomanni. He did so successfully enough that

these peoples disappeared from history after his reign. He died, in fact, very near the modern city of Vienna, at the Roman military camp of Vindobona on the Danube, which lies today in the northern suburbs of that later imperial city.

We know most about Marcus Aurelius through his book of personal reflections, *The Meditations*, which some see as the first autobiography, though most consider it something other than that. At the end of a tough day, Marcus Aurelius would come back to his tent and write down his thoughts about this or that moral problem, this or that general issue — very rarely relating it to his own experience that day or indeed at any point in his lifetime. *The Meditations* are a series of reflections on general issues written by a particular man who preferred to find validation in general principles rather than in individual privileges. Since this man was the most powerful ruler in the world known to West Europeans, West Asians, and North Africans, that was a rather impressive kind of commitment.

The most striking message one receives from *The Meditations* is its sense of unflinching adherence to private and public virtue as the only form of real happiness. Virtue is its own reward for Marcus Aurelius, as indeed for the entire Stoic tradition. Rarely has that conviction been more powerfully stated by a man of anything like comparable power.

Although composed in Greek, *The Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius have been read in Latin and in translations into modern languages ever since they were written, and they enjoyed special favor among eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European gentlemen struggling with the demands of imperial rule. Many an English product of a public school, or perhaps of Oxford or Cambridge, who was out in India or in the British West Indies trying to rule an empire both justly and at all, took great comfort in reading *The Meditations*. It is very

short, and one can read it in short passages — just as they were composed, a short burst at a time — while ensuring that one's Greek, or if one's Greek was fading, one's English translation with facing pages, was still up to the task.

The Breadth and Egalitarianism of Stoicism: Epictetus

Some think that Epicureanism appealed to most upper-class Romans of any philosophical inclination, though they often did not want to admit it. But we must recognize that Stoicism was by far the most publicly favored philosophical school. On the basis of the surviving written evidence, Stoicism was the most widespread Greek philosophy among the rulers and beneficiaries of the Roman Empire.

It was also remarkably egalitarian, which is a surprise given that the Roman Empire was a very good deal for the top five percent of the population. The clearest evidence of this is the career of the Phrygian slave Epictetus, born around 55 CE and dying apparently in 135 CE, who became a respected teacher of Stoic ethics. Freed by his master, he moved to Rome, where his teachings were so popular that a student compiled an anthology of his lectures called the *Manual*. That work tremendously influenced the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius — a remarkable arc, from slave to emperor, by means of manumission and the delivery of lectures written down and compiled by faithful students.

Epictetus believed that the only things truly in our power are our will and our body. Our will is always free, and we must keep both it and our body untainted. In that way, we will avoid pain, which is merely external to us and cannot touch the inner citadel of a truly Stoic soul.

Lecture 11: Roman Eclecticism, Cicero and Polybius

Professor Jeremy Adams

The Nature of Roman Philosophy

It is time to talk about Roman philosophy. What is Roman philosophy? It is very easy to dismiss it as entirely derivative — entirely drawn from Greek thinking and from Greek thinkers. And of course that is true. But there are two important things we should remember about what the Romans did with the Greek philosophical tradition. First, they tended to combine its various strands in new and interesting ways, producing combinations that were not simply a matter of Greek components assembled together, but those components brought together with a new element, a new cast, a new spin. Second, as has already been remarked, the Romans managed to spread Greek philosophy, finding for it an audience far wider than any of the Greek philosophers had originally expected.

The distinctive Roman style in philosophy — and it is a style the Romans can legitimately claim — could be described by three terms: eclectic, synthetic, and syncretic. These three terms may sound very nearly the same, but they are in fact quite different. Taking elements from the various Greek schools and traditions — the eclectic process, choosing from here and there — Roman thinkers would then synthesize those elements into a new compound, a new mixture. The entire process of eclectic choosing and synthetic blending goes by the term *syncretic*, which is not simply a synonym for either of the other two words but rather a description of the overall process that involves them both as sequential steps.

If anything, Romans preferred broadly eclectic synthesis to the revival of any single philosophical tradition. From about the second century

BCE onward, Greeks began to become Neo-Platonists, Neo-Aristotelians, Neo-Stoics, and so forth, attempting to recover the purity of one original tradition — and in doing so, if anything, narrowing the appeal of that tradition to a larger clientele. The Romans, by contrast, tried to combine these traditions, and not merely to combine them but to give a new character to the very combination.

Cicero: Life and Political Background

The most influential of the Roman syncretic philosophers was Marcus Tullius Cicero, born in 106 BCE and dying on the seventh of December, 43 BCE — a day which seemed to many conservative Roman intellectuals a day of infamy, even back in that year, without having to wait until 1941.

Cicero was what the Romans called a *novus homo*, a new man. He was not a member of the old Roman nobility. His family was quite distinguished as well as quite wealthy, claiming descent from the kings of the Volscians to the southeast of Rome — and given the size of those populations and the stability of social structures in that part of the world at that time, it seems an entirely reasonable claim. The particular stretch of country that he came from, the small city of Arpinum on the slopes of the Italian mountains sliding down into the Campania, the great flat plain south of Rome, was also the home of Marius — Marius who would become the uncle-by-marriage of Julius Caesar, a man of modest origins who rose by talent to be the supreme commander of the Roman army and then consul half a dozen times in succession. In later centuries, that same stretch of countryside would attract Benedict of Nursia, who founded the greatest of his monasteries at Monte Cassino, and some centuries after that it would be the home of the family of Thomas Aquinas.

From Marius to Cicero to Benedict to Thomas Aquinas, that particular stretch of Italian countryside has been extraordinarily rich in thinkers and figures of ethical idealism.

Cicero's parents sent him to study rhetoric and politics in Rome, hoping he would make a political career for himself, and then sent him east — to Athens and to Rhodes — where he loved to attend the lectures of the various clashing schools, not only schools of rhetoric but schools of philosophy of other kinds as well. When he returned to Rome in his late twenties, ready to begin a practical political career, he attached himself to the party of the *optimates*, the aristocratic party, and especially to a faction within it derived from the so-called Scipionic circle of the second century BCE. This circle had gathered around the great Publius Cornelius Scipio Aemilianus Africanus Numantinus, whose very name indicates his high standing in Roman society — a group which favored Stoicism, and especially not Stoicism alone, but Stoicism insofar as it could be blended with old native Roman traditions of patriotism and virtue. Here already, in the second century BCE, we see the Roman tendency to bring in new philosophy not simply by copying it, but by fusing it with native elements into something genuinely new.

While in Greece, Cicero had developed a particular interest in Skeptic and in Epicurean philosophy as well. In political life back home, he showed the same combining tendency. He displayed more sympathy for the popular concerns of the rival party of the *populares* than the right wing of his own party really liked, and he picked and chose various positions, trying to bring together the various elements of his own party and to find common ground at the center. Picking and choosing what seemed to him good ideas and good attitudes was simply his temperament, his personality — one that expressed itself naturally in the kind of eclectically synthesized philosophy he was to contribute to the future.

No doubt Cicero's sense of the wisdom of eclecticism was heightened by the fact that during his lifetime the Roman Republic was passing through its terminal phases of internal dissension and dissolution. Civil war followed dictator followed civil war followed dictator, finally culminating in the victory of Octavian — the nephew and adopted heir of Julius Caesar — over his enemies, including Brutus, and ultimately over his first ally and then rival, Mark Antony, in 31 BCE. Twelve years after Cicero's death, the process had reached its conclusion. Cicero was born into a world in which he already knew that process was underway, and he was deeply distressed by it. Even if he had been the sort of person who would have preferred to adhere to one or another traditional doctrine or traditional party, he saw that that was no longer possible. And if it was not possible, how could it be good? At base, Cicero was a man of deep practicality — moral as well as political.

Cicero's Career and the Philippics

Cicero's synthesizing eclecticism is most evident in his ethical doctrines. It has been remarked that he splits the difference between Epicurean ethics and Stoic ethics, and it is entirely fitting and natural that he should do so.

From Stoicism, Cicero drew the principle that virtue is sufficient for happiness — that virtue *is* happiness, whatever atrocities the external world inflicts upon us. And the external world was doing a very good job of inflicting atrocities, not simply on conquered subject populations but on the aristocracy of the Roman Republic itself, the aristocracy of the party which at the moment was losing.

Appropriately enough, Cicero felt rather ill-treated by the Roman political class after he had reached the pinnacle of legitimate political power during his term as consul in 63 BCE. The consuls, as you will

recall, were the chief executives of the Roman state — a dual executive, each serving for only one year, but wielding extraordinary power during that year. Cicero was probably aware that he had reached the consulship largely because of a serious split within his own party. He was a kind of compromise candidate who would not normally have been put forward in the regular course of things. He then felt that he was rather badly abandoned by his party when many of his fellow party members failed to back him up in the aftermath of his actions against the conspiracy of Catiline.

Cicero therefore retired from public life for ten years. During that period, he was invited by Julius Caesar to join the new triumvirate of Caesar, Pompey, and Crassus, which was then positioned to take over the direction of the Roman state, but he refused. He remained in philosophical retirement, collecting and editing more than eight hundred letters he had written to friends and family across the years, and composing a whole series of treatises on practical philosophical topics such as old age, friendship, the nature of the gods, divination, and many other subjects as well.

Then, after Caesar's assassination on the Ides of March, 44 BCE, Cicero briefly and brilliantly re-entered the political arena, directing his attacks against Mark Antony. Octavian, imitating his adoptive father's policy of trying to win Cicero over, found in Cicero a sympathetic figure. When Octavian and Antony began to show signs of strain between them, Cicero focused his attacks upon Antony directly, and with tremendous courage delivered a series of speeches in the Roman Senate attacking him — consciously imitating the speeches of the great Athenian orator Demosthenes, who had had the courage to speak out against Philip of Macedon several centuries before. Just as Demosthenes' speeches against Philip were called the *Philippics*, so Cicero's speeches against Antony have been known by the same name ever since.

Antony, understandably, hated Cicero and ignored whatever appeals Octavian may have made for mercy. He had Cicero killed, and caused his tongue and his hands to be nailed to the *rostra* — the speaker's platform in the Roman Forum, upon which had long since been mounted the prows of captured Carthaginian warships. It was an act of terrible symbolic completeness directed against a man whose power had lain entirely in words.

Cicero's Ethical Synthesis

From Epicureanism, Cicero drew the complementary principle that the cultivation of refined and disciplined pleasure is not inconsistent with virtue. The Stoics had given him the notion that virtue was its own reward — and since the reward he actually got in life was anything but comfortable, it was fortunate that he held that doctrine. But from Epicureanism he drew the further principle that virtue need not stand alone, that refined and disciplined pleasure could be entirely consistent with virtue and constituted a valid source of happiness.

To Cicero, rejecting such pleasure — which was certainly available to him as a highly educated and very wealthy member of the ruling circle of the world — seemed excessive and unnecessary. In the Epicurean tradition, discipline certainly did not require asceticism. They saw asceticism as irrational and unnatural.

Cicero appears to have lived a life consistent with this balanced Stoic-Epicurean principle of pleasurable virtue and virtuous pleasure. We know a good deal about his deep admiration for and closeness to his wife, about his relationship with his family, and we have no evidence of his indulging in inappropriate relationships of any kind. We know that he treated his slaves with considerably more kindness than was normal in that world, and the proof of it came at the very

end: when Antony's assassins closed in upon him as he was attempting to escape in his litter — knowing, probably, that there was no real point — his own slaves stood by him. That was most unusual behavior in the ancient world, and a sign of the tremendous decency with which this Epicurean Stoic had treated those dependent upon him.

Cicero's Political Philosophy and Deontology

A similar combination of virtue and pleasure — and in fact a far more thoroughgoing synthesis of the two — occurs in the realm of political philosophy.

From Stoicism, Cicero drew a deep commitment to duty, drawing on a form of moral reasoning that some called deontology, from the Greek word *deon*, meaning duty or obligation. For Cicero, civic virtue was essentially civic deontology — obedience to duty, whatever the consequences. And he had to face quite severe consequences at several points in his life, most brutally at the very end.

From Aristotle, however, Cicero drew certain ideas that made the Stoic deontology to which he was attracted a good deal more pragmatic, and, I think one must say, attractive. The kind of pragmatism he found in Aristotle was not unprincipled. It was a more or less consistent blending of principles already dignified by the name of empiricism — essentially the study of what experience actually shows us works in a consistent manner, and the application of the results of that study to one's own behavior. In civic and political life, which mattered most to Cicero in this regard, empiricism meant examining what had actually worked over time and using those findings as a guide to action.

Polybius: The Mixed Constitution and the Rise of Rome

A major influence on Cicero's practical empiricism was the great Greek diplomat, historian, and philosopher Polybius, born around 200 BCE and dying around 118 BCE. Polybius was a deeply patriotic Greek who came to Rome in the year 167 BCE as a hostage. His particular political faction in Greece had been defeated by the Roman general Aemilius Paulus at the Battle of Pydna in 167 BCE — a battle which gave Rome dominance over the European part of the old Macedonian Empire, the most thoroughly Greek part of the Hellenistic world that had dominated the eastern Mediterranean since the death of Alexander the Great.

He was, however, extremely well treated by the Romans, who respected him and who had a general policy of cultivating hostages for later political connections. Polybius became a valued member of the Scipionic circle, entering the formal staff of Publius Cornelius Scipio Aemilianus Africanus Numantinus — who earned the title *Africanus* just as his adoptive grandfather had, by finally defeating Carthage, and who earned the title *Numantinus* by ending the last significant rebellion against Roman rule in Spain with the terrible siege of Numantia. This extraordinary man, born around 185 BCE and dying in 129 BCE after a relatively short life of some fifty-six years, was the first prominent convert among the Roman upper class to Stoicism. He also cultivated the arts, sciences, literature, and poetry of the Greek East, attempting to transplant them to Roman use — sometimes having them translated into Latin, but in any case endeavoring to make good use of them for the Roman future.

Polybius wrote a history that was, in a certain sense, the first comprehensive history ever written. By comprehensive, I mean a history that accounts for events throughout the world as Polybius

knew it. From our perspective this is decidedly Western — he is essentially talking about the Mediterranean basin — but neither Herodotus nor Thucydides before him, the two other historians of comparable stature, had attempted anything like it.

Polybius was absolutely fascinated by a fifty-three-year period stretching from 220 BCE to 167 BCE, the date of the victory at Pydna. In 220 BCE, Rome did not yet even control all of Italy. By 167 BCE, it controlled what Polybius called the whole world. Direct rule over the Asian coast and Egypt was not achieved until later, in the days of Julius Caesar, but Rome did not really need direct control — it had absolute dominance over those kingdoms to whatever extent it desired.

What could account for the incredible rise of this republic in the course of that half-century and more? Polybius goes back to recount the great stories of the Punic Wars — the wars in which the Carthaginians, called the *Poeni* by the Romans because they were Phoenician in origin, fought the Roman Republic; the great wars between the Scipio family and the family of Hannibal Barca. Polybius shows himself a master of military narrative. But what really interests him even more than the magnificent stories of Hannibal crossing the Alps with his elephants is the story of character. The character of commanders such as the Scipios, such as Hannibal and his heroic brothers and brothers-in-law. The characters also of the peoples these commanders led. The Romans come in for much praise from Polybius on that score, for he felt that Roman character was of a kind that Rome could endure any hardship and emerge victorious.

In Book Six of his *Histories*, Polybius goes further — becoming more strictly political, more thoroughly philosophical in a practical sense. He sets out to explain Rome's success not merely through its character, but through its constitution, which he saw as a perfect example of the mixed government that Aristotle had pragmatically

recommended: a combination of monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy. In the Roman case, the monarchy was embodied in the consulate, even though consuls served only a single year and although there were two of them to check one another — for their power within that year was tremendous, and in certain moments could be as absolute as anything exercised by any Eastern tyrant. The monarchy was checked, balanced, and blended with by the Senate, from which practically all consuls arose. And the element of democracy was present in the election to any significant Roman office by the whole body of citizens — a democracy also conscious of its rights, since the Romans had early on established the office of the tribune, who existed specifically to protect the rights of the common people. In this blend of consular monarchy, senatorial aristocracy, and tribunician democracy, Polybius saw Aristotle's practical political philosophy expressing itself in powerful and useful ways.

Cicero's *De Re Publica* and the Dream of Scipio

Cicero agreed entirely, and he stated in his dialogue *De Re Publica* that the Roman state so constituted had been the most perfect civil society in human history — at least in the days of the magnificent grandfather of the Scipio he knew, and even into the days of the Scipio that Polybius had known, though Rome was already beginning to slip by that point.

Cicero's *De Re Publica* is a fascinating work, written during his active political career rather than during the ten years of philosophical retirement at the end of his life. He sets it up as a dialogue among people who actually existed, some of them people he personally knew. He tells us he learned about this conversation from one of its youngest participants, when that person was an old man governing a

Roman province in Asia with such virtue and dignity that the Asians could scarcely believe it, and the Romans could scarcely believe it either.

What Cicero does is reach back in time to the days of the great six-named Scipio and describe a conversation at Scipio's country estate about what would be the most perfect form of government. His aim is to construct a kind of answer to Plato's *Republic* — with which he did not agree — and also a response to Zeno's cosmopolitan *Republic*, with which he did not entirely agree either. Instead, he proposes a republic, a *res publica*, which has actually existed in history, and which during the long course of its existence was the most perfect state in human history and the most perfect state that human beings could probably ever dream of creating. In his own time, of course — the time of the dissolution of the Republic — Cicero was acutely aware that this state no longer existed, at least not in its inner substance and moral character, even if it still existed on paper.

The dialogue comes to an extraordinary conclusion in the passage known as the Dream of Scipio. Pressed by his friends to describe an unusual out-of-body experience he has hinted at, Scipio reluctantly tells of it. What Cicero is doing here is constructing a myth in the manner of Plato — a myth meaning, in this sense, not a falsehood but a statement that goes beyond ordinary rational speech into the higher reaches of the moral imagination.

In the dream, the younger Scipio Africanus — our six-named hero — is brought up to visit his dead grandfather, the elder Publius Cornelius Scipio Africanus. What the elder Africanus then does is show his grandson the world. He lifts the dreaming younger Africanus to a still point high above the earth from which they can survey the entire globe — a view very much like the view of the globe which Socrates describes in the *Phaedo*. From this vantage,

Carthage, the old enemy now restored to commerce, and the Roman Empire itself seem rather puny. The Romans, rather like Socrates' Greeks, are inhabitants of only a small portion of the earth, though they imagine that they fill the globe with their virtue and grandeur.

The elder Africanus predicts the future, explains the nature of the universe, and reveals a doctrine which cannot be demonstrated or determined by reason alone, but which can be stated in this kind of mythic revelation: that there is an afterlife. An afterlife of blessedness, reserved for those who practice virtue — civic virtue and interior virtue — to a heroic degree. Heroic virtue earns immortality. Those who do not achieve it simply vanish and disappear. There does not appear to be much, if anything, in the way of an accompanying hell — although there has been some disagreement on that point — but that seems to be the direct reading of the text.

Here, then, is a reward for virtue that transcends virtue itself and transcends the kind of disciplined and refined pleasure that the Epicurean tradition praised and that Cicero had sought to attach to Stoic devotion to virtue in his earlier thinking. He makes a religious statement: there is in fact a life of considerable blessedness for those who can combine pleasure and virtue in the right way, provided they do so to a heroic degree. It is, I think, rather interesting that this very definition of the requirement for immortality is essentially the definition that medieval Christianity would adopt for sainthood. A saint is a person who practices heroic virtue and is thereby honored at the altar. This is an extension of Cicero's attempt to define the ultimate reward of virtue for his own pagan time. An Africanus elder and an Africanus younger had achieved a great deal of both victory and fame in this world. But here is a reward beyond even those. And here was a kind of religious philosophy — practical, concrete,

focused on a disciplined elite — that a practical Roman could appreciate, could spread, could preach, and could believe in.

Cicero's Influence on Later Western Thought

Cicero's influence on later periods of Western thought has been absolutely immense. From the eighth to the twelfth centuries — the Carolingian period and the first great expansion of medieval West European culture — Cicero was the most respected, studied, and imitated classical thinker in Western Europe. When Charlemagne was attempting to get his Frankish nobles to do a better job of ruling the great empire that had fallen to them — not only in terms of treating subject peoples better, but in terms of governing the Frankish people with greater justice — he had the scholars of his palace school teach him, his sons, and their companions through Ciceronian dialogues. Alcuin, the Englishman brought in to improve the culture of the Carolingian court, staged a dialogue with Charlemagne about rhetoric — an effort to present to the Christian Franks the whole bundle of Cicero's teaching, thought, and example.

After yielding some ground to Plato and Aristotle in philosophy from roughly 1200 to about 1330 — though never yielding ground as a model of Latin prose style — Cicero arose again as a dominant influence in the Renaissance, and his influence lasted brilliantly throughout the seventeenth, eighteenth, and into the nineteenth century. For a very long time, well into the era of the public schools of imperial England, he was regarded as a perfect model for the cultivated gentleman — both in his forensic oratory and in his elegant but concise prose style, and as the spokesman for an enlightened and humane personal ethic that made him a good friend, a good husband, a good consul, a good diplomat, and a good human being.

Lecture 12: Roman Skepticism and Sextus Empiricus

Professor Jeremy Adams

Origins and Character of Skepticism

Skepticism was a philosophical tradition — sometimes organized into formal schools, but often far more casual than that — which arose in the generation of drastic cultural change following the death of Aristotle. It is more traditional to speak of the transformation of the Greek world after the death of Alexander in 323 BCE, but the death of Aristotle the following year, 322 BCE, is of course far more important for the history of philosophy. Although looked upon with some suspicion by Roman culture, skepticism continued to thrive under Roman rule, especially in the Eastern and Greek-speaking half of the Empire. It was revived in modern times for the Enlightenment of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and it remains a powerful current in modern Western thought.

The skeptics were trying to do what most philosophies have attempted to do — that is, to find a secure basis for human happiness. What distinguished them from the Greek philosophical schools that preceded them, including Sophism, Platonism, and Aristotelianism, and from the new schools of Epicureanism and Stoicism that arose at roughly the same time, was that the skeptics tried to ground the pursuit of happiness in a denial of knowledge rather than in the affirmation of one or another path toward knowledge.

Pyrrho of Elis: The Founder

The apparent founder of skepticism was Pyrrho of Elis, born around 365 BCE and dying around 275 BCE. He was a soldier attached to the

staff of Alexander the Great on the long march to India, where he must have encountered a world very different from the Hellenic normality of his own small mountainous polis of Elis in the Peloponnesus. Some scholars speculate that Pyrrho may have communicated with Hindu wise men and thus encountered a very different intellectual world as well.

In any case, after Alexander's death in Babylon in 323 BCE, Pyrrho returned to Elis, his small native city. Taking absolute skepticism to its logical conclusions, he wrote nothing — which is pleasantly ironic, since his followers proceeded to write book after book of Pyrrhonic hypotheses, Pyrrhonic sayings, and Pyrrhonic compilations of every kind for some five centuries after his death.

According to the disciples who did publish, Pyrrho taught that one must neither trust nor reject sense impressions, nor any other kind of apparent knowledge. Reason — apparently more reliable than the varying deliverances of the senses, and the faculty to which most philosophers had had recourse before him — cannot in fact, said Pyrrho, reach the inner substance of things. Whether as objects of rational inquiry or as items of sense data, things can be known to us only as they appear to one or another of our faculties. Since things appear differently to different observers, and indeed to the different faculties of any single observer, and since we can develop equally good arguments in favor of quite diverse descriptions or explanations of any apparent thing, we can be certain of nothing. And since we can be certain of nothing, it is wise to withhold judgment. *Epechein* is the Greek word from which came the doctrine of *epochē*, meaning the withholding or suspension of judgment in scientific or moral matters.

A life of tranquil withdrawal was Pyrrho's ethical ideal, a state labeled *ataraxia* by his disciple Timon of Phlius, who wrote the first of the series of Pyrrhonic books about his master's sayings. The wise

person, according to Pyrrho, will strive to attain and maintain the soul in such an ataraxic condition. It seems to have worked well enough for Pyrrho himself, who appears to have died at the then extraordinary age of ninety.

What about human laws, customs, and religious practices — the public liturgies essential to the functioning of the polytheistic civic culture of the Greeks, and indeed of all the other cultures of the ancient Mediterranean, West Asian, and South Asian world at that time? How should a reflective person thoroughly convinced of Pyrrhonic skepticism respond to those liturgies of public life? Obey them, Pyrrho is reported to have said. Stay out of trouble. Avoid scandal. Act decently in your community. Be decent.

Timon — whom the later Roman skeptic Sextus Empiricus called the apostle, or prophet, of Pyrrho's sayings, somewhat as Paul stood in relation to Jesus in the elaboration of Christian teaching — spiced up this first book of the skeptical tradition with satirical treatments of other philosophers of the time, excepting of course Pyrrho himself, and, interestingly enough, Xenophon. Pyrrho's followers spread his oral teachings widely.

The Academy's Turn toward Skepticism

A sign of skepticism's considerable appeal to the contemporary Greek mentality is the fact that Plato's school of advanced study, the Academy at Athens, was dominated by fairly extreme forms of skeptical philosophy from the early third century to the early first century BCE.

Arcesilaus, 314–241 BCE, who became the director of the Academy less than a century after its foundation by Plato around 369 BCE, is generally described as the founder of the Second or Middle Academy. The Academy itself remained in continuous legal existence

as an institution until 529 CE, when the Christian Roman Emperor Justinian closed it for reasons both fiscal and doctrinal — an extraordinarily long duration in the course of which it passed through many different phases of attachment to various philosophical modes and affirmations.

Arcesilaus, upon becoming head of the Academy and directing it into its second phase, is supposed to have declared that he was not even certain of his own uncertainty — thus going Socrates one better, since Socrates at least knew that he knew nothing. Arcesilaus was particularly critical of Stoic thought, and one can understand why, since Stoicism found itself in the awkward position of being committed simultaneously to a materialist view of ultimate reality — including a God who, for the Stoics, was himself a material reality — and an overarchingly spiritual set of moral imperatives.

Arcesilaus aspired to do to Stoicism what Socrates had done so devastatingly to Sophism, although he was far less successful than Socrates had been. It is important to recognize that, despite his many departures from Plato's own line of thought, Arcesilaus tried to remain true to the broader tradition, seeking to re-embody the style of Socratic teaching and, as he understood it, the substance of Socratic content as well.

Consistent with Pyrrho's denial of knowledge was Arcesilaus' exploration of human subjectivity — and here again one can see echoes of the Sophist tradition against which Socrates had originally reacted: the tradition that abandons the search for objective truth and turns instead to an exploration of the subjective dimensions of human experience. No sense impression we receive, and no statement we make about any external object, carries any guarantee of validity, according to Arcesilaus. Why? Because we can be firmly convinced subjectively of something that others can see to be

objectively false, or that we ourselves will in time come to see as objectively false.

The obvious counter-argument, launched by the Stoics in response, was that the skeptics had undercut the very notion that any kind of objective certainty exists — and in doing so had sawed off the branch on which they were sitting. The skeptics denied this, but, much as they accused their opponents of circular reasoning, they found themselves caught in considerable coils of circularity as well.

Carneades and the New Academy

The so-called Third or New Academy was founded by Carneades, 213 to approximately 128 BCE. He maintained the Middle Academy's attack on Stoicism, though with somewhat less ferocity. In one instance, he went on an embassy from the Athenian city-state to Rome in the company of the Stoic philosopher Diogenes, and they appear to have gotten along quite amicably. But in his philosophical doctrine, Carneades went decisively beyond the Middle Academy, teaching that knowledge is not merely uncertain but impossible. Humans, he argued, have no reliable criterion of proof. Any proof rests on assumptions that must themselves be proved in turn. He went so far as to argue that any scientific statement based on sense data could be contradicted with equal validity by a statement derived from dreams, visions, hallucinations, and the like. The Stoic effort to resolve the dispute between scientific affirmation and hallucinatory affirmation was doomed because, as the Stoics themselves conceded, rational arguments consist of concepts based ultimately on human experience — which can never be verified from outside itself in any durable or transmissible way.

Since the conduct of practical human life makes complete suspension of judgment absolutely impossible, however, Carneades

developed standards of probability that allow us to act in the world. One can of course choose to become a hermit — either of the Indian type or, later, of the Christian type — if one wishes to be a consistent skeptic in the manner of Pyrrho. But the skeptics were too thoroughly Greek, many of them too thoroughly Athenian, to imagine life as anything other than active civic engagement. So Carneades affirmed that while we can never attain scientific truth, let alone ethical truth, we should continue to seek it nonetheless. And we should maintain and conform to the ethical standards of our own community, whatever it and its standards may happen to be.

In theology, the skeptics tended toward atheism. They were, in a sense, moral relativists — any moral pattern is acceptable provided you adhere to it; you do not have the liberty of simply prescinding from the morality of your own community — but when it came to the gods, they leaned toward denial. If there is any kind of divine providence, they asked, how do we explain the existence of poisonous snakes? If someone believes a snake has bitten and is about to kill him, then that is a reality for that person, and thus an entirely valid reality in the world of impressions.

Carneades was especially critical of Stoic ideas about divine law, which presumably had to emanate from some form of consistent divine justice. Cicero disapproved of this skeptical critique, even though he had been initially attracted to other aspects of skeptical teaching. Natural law was too important to his Roman sensibility for him to follow the Middle Academy this far.

Sextus Empiricus: Life and Works

The most complete and most durably influential of skepticism's teachers — durable because his books have survived better than anyone else's — was a medical doctor known as Sextus Empiricus, a

Roman who may have lived around 200 CE, though some scholars place him roughly fifty years later. Sextus practiced medicine at Rome, and three of his books survive, preserved through later Latin translations. He wrote them in Greek, which may seem somewhat at odds with his Roman identity, but we should remember that the Emperor Marcus Aurelius also wrote his personal *Meditations* in Greek rather than Latin.

Sextus represents a second wave of Roman skepticism, arising from a fresh reexamination of the early Pyrrhonic tradition after the end of the Third Academy, which effectively dissolved in the first century BCE when the Academy as a whole turned away from skepticism toward dogmatic philosophy. The very uncertainty about the dates of Sextus Empiricus is telling. It suggests that he was far from the center of Greco-Roman intellectual life, despite residing in Rome — which had been a welcoming home for philosophical schools since the days of the Scipionic Circle in the second century BCE. Roman skepticism, in other words, appears to have been somewhat peripheral, estranged from the established intelligentsia of the Empire.

The epithet *Empiricus* was applied to Sextus because he maintained that the closest we can come to a criterion of truth is experience — *empeiria* in Greek. This was not a new claim; it was the old skeptical doctrine from the beginning. But to those who copied his works, Sextus seemed to embody that doctrine with particular clarity and to push it to the forefront of the entire skeptical critique of other schools.

Besides, the Roman state was entering its second long spasm of civil wars, which would last from 235 to 284 CE when the Emperor Diocletian finally restored order. Cicero had made his well-remembered contributions during the earlier and longer period of civil strife in the first century BCE, but his synthetic eclecticism had retained little of his early interest in skepticism. Sextus, by contrast,

tried to be a pure Pyrrhonist in the Greek style of philosophical orthodoxy — refusing to allow that tradition to be combined with, or in his view contaminated by, elements of Stoicism, Epicureanism, or Aristotelianism, as Cicero had not merely permitted himself but had actively encouraged others to do.

Sextus's Philosophical Arguments

Any science based on reason or logic, said Sextus Empiricus, is not to be trusted. Widely attested experience is our surest guide to probability — the kind of probability already developed by Carneades. Knowledge we cannot have; certainty we cannot have; but probability can be approached if we accumulate sufficient evidence. The way to build up a sense of the probability of our impressions, Carneades had said and Sextus Empiricus strongly repeated, is to mass them together. If, for example, we see in a milling crowd someone who appears to be a friend of ours but of whom we are not quite sure, we should approach him, listen to his voice, observe his mannerisms and body language, and if all of these correspond to what we know of our friend, we can be reasonably convinced that our initial impression is probably correct.

Sextus wrote three works: *The Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, *Against the Mathematicians* — a not entirely adequate title — and *Against the Academics*, which some prefer to render as *Against the Professors*. The first book, *The Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, is itself in three parts: the first presents the case for skepticism in a constructive way, while the following two attack the other schools of thought that Sextus, in the long tradition, calls dogmatic. His second book, *Against the Mathematicians*, breaks down dogmatic philosophy by categories rather than by schools — into the issues supposedly resolved by

logic, by physical science, and by ethics respectively. In the first part of this work, he attacks Stoic logic with particular force.

Both there and in *The Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, Sextus attacks syllogistic reasoning. He argues that syllogisms are hopelessly circular — that they require the major premise, the first of the classic three statements, to already acknowledge the claim of the concluding statement. Nineteenth-century philosophers such as John Stuart Mill would later take up that same attack. Sextus also attacks causal reasoning. If A is said to be the cause of B, he argues, there are three possibilities, each of which fails. A and B cannot exist at the same time, because then B could just as readily be called the cause of A. A cannot exist before and without B, because a thing is only the cause of another thing by virtue of its relationship to that thing. And A cannot exist after B and be its cause, for obvious reasons. If this critique strikes us as lacking in common sense, it nevertheless made clever use of the very rules of logic that the Stoics themselves had developed.

Sextus attacks divine providence much as Carneades had, meditating on the gruesome implications of evil in a world supposedly supervised by a good, infinite, and impartial God. If there is a divine providence, said Sextus, that providence must be not only infinitely good and infinitely wise and consistent, but also in its consistency entirely impartial. We all know that poisonous snakes bite some people and kill them, while not biting others, or biting them without fatal effect. How is this possible if there is a providence that is benign, good, infinite, and entirely impartial to all? Perhaps there is a providence sympathetic to some and unsympathetic to others — but in that case it cannot be just, cannot be impartially just in any meaningful sense. In a way, Sextus is here anticipating something like the doctrine of predestination, which would become so significant for a Christianity shaped by the philosophical reasoning of these

Greek schools — launched by Paul and formulated by Augustine, who was affected by the skeptics not in doctrine but in the generic form and mode of argumentation.

His third book, *Against the Academics* — or *Against the Professors* — takes a rather unexpected turn, criticizing teachers of grammar, rhetoric, geometry, arithmetic, astrology, and music, and showing minimum respect for the traditional value of traditional education. This attitude would, interestingly enough, find an echo in the newly converted Saint Augustine's own early dialogue against the academics. And in Sextus's hands, the title *Against the Academics* also signals that the Academy, which had been the great stronghold of skeptical thought from Arcesilaus through the end of the first century BCE, was now itself the enemy — having grown very dogmatic, and at this point embarking on a return to Platonism that we call, appropriately enough, Neoplatonism.

Daily Life, Ethics, and the Limits of Knowledge

As regards daily life and happiness — the fundamental goal of any of these philosophical schools — Sextus Empiricus maintained the teaching of the earlier Pyrrhonists. We should trust all perceptions equally, our own and other people's as well. We must respect current laws and customs and any kind of established convention, unless it does extreme violence to what appears to us to be a necessary affirmation. That last qualification raises a genuinely complicated question: should skeptics become martyrs, as Socrates had? The skeptical tradition wants to recover Socrates' kind of integrity, and it is possible that there are grounds for a form of skeptical martyrdom, though this is not made fully clear by the text of Sextus's own writings. It is, nevertheless, an issue that empiricism would be forced to face in later centuries and later revivals.

We should, Sextus argues, respond to our natural instincts and apparent needs, and we must keep pursuing scientific truth even though it is ultimately unattainable. Intellectual virtue lies in that seeking, in that ongoing quest.

The central issue endlessly raised by skepticism is, at bottom, fairly central to any thinking person: how do we know? Logic, one must eventually admit, is always culture-bound, despite the strenuous efforts of Aristotle and later logicians to free it from cultural assumptions. It is therefore not a sufficiently reliable method for ascertaining truth. So what can we trust? Practical experience is the skeptic's answer.

The Legacy of Skepticism in Modern Thought

For many centuries, intellectuals interested in science have hoped that if physical inquiry could become sufficiently empirical, it might serve as our best guide to certainty, or at least to probability. Hence the early modern effort to establish an empirical scientific method. This cast of mind had great influence on the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century and continues to shape the attitude of laboratory science to the present day. What does the standard science teacher inculcate in students very early on in a course in chemistry, biology, or physics? That there is an empirical standard by which we can judge reality. Science is not simply a clash of theories; science yields empirical certitude, indeed certain knowledge. This, I think, lies at the core of the considerable dispute between evolutionists and creationists. Evolutionists tend to insist that evolution is clearly established. Creationists insist that it is not, and that the account given in Genesis is the correct one. Insofar as scientists are willing to acknowledge that evolution is a theory, and that the account in Genesis is also a theory, and that we must look

for the greater probability as we examine the two, the dispute tends to be resolvable. But unless one is willing to abandon the claim that empirical science can give us absolute and lasting knowledge, we are caught in a very difficult kind of problem.

Ironically, beginning with the scientific revolution itself, human experience has been having a hard time of it for the past four centuries. Modern science has shown that very little of ordinary experience is accurate. The sun, for example, does not rise in the east over a flat earth and set in the west, which would appear to be obviously the case if we judged purely from our experience. Greek cosmologists were able to determine that the earth was round on the basis of geometrical reasoning, and some skeptics accepted that conclusion because they argued that the geometrical theorems establishing the roundness of the globe were conducive to probability, even if not to certain knowledge. We would have to say that we do not attain genuinely certain knowledge of the earth's globular shape until the era of space photography, when an image can show us directly that the globe is round — though a true skeptic would continue to maintain that what we have here is an impression, which, while it should be trusted given the supporting probability evidence, is still not absolutely certain.

When they got down to basic questions about the nature of matter, the skeptics tended toward an atomic view of reality. They were influenced by Democritus, who argued that all reality was composed of atoms — tiny units that could not be divided any further, the very word *atomos* meaning something that cannot be cut. That atomic material reality has of course been broken down over and over again, and the ultimate particle now identified, the quark, is accessible to us only through highly abstract mathematics, which to anyone who is not an advanced mathematician presents itself simply as an

impression — one that may or may not combine with other impressions to give us something approaching probability.

And so it goes. Modern science, ironically enough, has not encouraged confidence in average, normal human experience. Yet empiricism has clearly been an enormously attractive mental habit to the modern West.

David Hume, the great eighteenth-century Scottish thinker, was strongly attracted by skeptical argument and made much of the skeptical attacks upon Platonic, Aristotelian, Stoic, and Epicurean modes of proof. John Stuart Mill in the nineteenth century was particularly drawn to Sextus Empiricus's attack upon the syllogism, and he extended it. Mill also tried to resolve the problem of divine providence, since he wished to maintain a kind of very free-form, latitudinarian belief in God. He arrived at the fascinating notion that God is in fact limited, and that our moral task is to collaborate with God in achieving the providential goals that God desires but cannot fully enforce — an interesting idea indeed.

One could argue, I think, that the deconstructionists of the late twentieth century — the great French school of Derrida, Lacan, Foucault, and others — are the skeptics of our own age. In their deconstruction, they take apart all the standard arguments for objective reality, leaving highly refined analysis of the impressions we receive as the surest available guide to any kind of valid statement. They represent, it seems to me, the third or fourth — or perhaps fifth — revival of the Pyrrhonic tradition, which has had so much to do with the direction in which Western thought has moved, despite the deep suspicion and disapproval which the Romans were the first to register against it.

Coda to Part I: Classical Origins

Every intellectual tradition has an origin story. Some begin with revelation, others with conquest, others with the authority of ancestral memory. The Western intellectual tradition begins with a question. More precisely, it begins with the discovery that questions can be pursued for their own sake, that human beings can investigate reality through reasoned inquiry rather than relying exclusively upon inherited custom, sacred narrative, or political authority. That discovery is the enduring achievement of the thinkers gathered in this first part of our journey.

From the earliest Pre-Socratics searching for the arche behind the diversity of nature, to Plato's quest for eternal truths, Aristotle's systematic exploration of the natural and moral worlds, the Stoic search for tranquility, and the skeptical challenge to certainty itself, we have witnessed the birth of nearly every major philosophical question that would occupy later centuries. The ancient world established the vocabulary of Western thought. It gave us metaphysics and ethics, political philosophy and logic, theories of knowledge and visions of the good life. Even when later thinkers rejected ancient answers, they continued to ask ancient questions.

What is perhaps most striking is the diversity of those answers. Heraclitus saw a universe of perpetual change. Parmenides denied that change was real. Plato sought permanence beyond appearances. Aristotle looked for intelligibility within the world of experience itself. The Stoics embraced providential order. The Skeptics counseled suspension of judgment. Yet beneath these disagreements lay a shared conviction: the world is worthy of investigation, and the human mind is capable of pursuing understanding.

That conviction became the defining inheritance of classical civilization.

Yet by the end of antiquity, philosophy had reached a kind of crossroads. It had explored nature, politics, psychology, ethics, and metaphysics with extraordinary depth. It had developed schools, methods, and intellectual traditions that would endure for millennia. But it had not produced consensus. The questions remained alive precisely because no final answer had commanded universal assent. Philosophy had achieved greatness, but it had not achieved closure.

At the same time, historical forces were reshaping the Mediterranean world. The city-states that had nurtured classical philosophy were long gone. The Roman Empire, which had provided political unity for centuries, was entering a period of profound transformation. New religious movements were spreading across the empire, offering answers to questions that Greek philosophy had often left unresolved. Questions about suffering, salvation, divine purpose, human destiny, and the meaning of history increasingly demanded attention.

The ancient philosophers had often asked how human beings might live wisely within the cosmos. The emerging biblical tradition asked something different: how human beings stand in relationship to a God who acts within history.

This transition is among the most consequential developments in intellectual history. The story of Western thought does not move from one tradition to another by simple replacement. Athens does not disappear when Jerusalem arrives. The philosophical inheritance of Greece remains too powerful, too sophisticated, too deeply embedded in the habits of inquiry that the ancient thinkers created. Instead, a remarkable encounter begins.

The next part of this course explores that encounter.

Part II introduces the meeting between two great streams of thought: the classical tradition of reason and philosophical inquiry, and the biblical tradition of revelation, covenant, and faith. The

questions raised by Plato and Aristotle will not vanish. They will be reinterpreted. The search for truth will become intertwined with the search for God. The philosophical examination of human nature will encounter doctrines of sin, grace, redemption, and salvation. The timeless concerns of metaphysics will meet the historical narratives of scripture.

In many ways, the thinkers of the Christian Age inherit the entire achievement of antiquity. They preserve it, transform it, challenge it, and ultimately weave it into a new intellectual synthesis that will shape Western civilization for more than a thousand years. Plato will reappear in Augustine. Aristotle will reappear in Aquinas. The questions of the Greeks will continue to echo within monasteries, universities, cathedrals, and theological debates. The ancient conversation is not ending. It is entering a new chapter.

The courage to question that animated the classical world remains indispensable. But the next stage of the journey asks whether reason alone is sufficient. It asks whether truth arrives only through inquiry, or whether it may also arrive through revelation. It asks whether wisdom consists merely in understanding the world, or in understanding humanity's place within a divinely ordered story.

The road from Athens now leads toward Jerusalem. The dialogue that follows will become one of the most creative, influential, and enduring conversations in human history.

Part II: The Christian Age

Preamble

If Part I of this course was about the birth of an intellectual tradition — the restless, speculative energy of ancient Greeks trying to understand the cosmos, the self, the state, and the grounds of moral life — then Part II is about that tradition's most dramatic transformation. Over the twelve lectures gathered here, two great streams of human thought, separated by language, geography, and sensibility, flow together and form something neither could have produced alone. The encounter between Jerusalem and Athens, between the biblical story of a covenanting God and the Greek philosophical quest for eternal forms, is the central event of the Western intellectual tradition, and Part II is where we watch it unfold in earnest.

The introductory lecture sets the scene with an image that is at once whimsical and genuinely illuminating: the Western tradition as a human body. The two legs — the classical tradition on the left, the biblical tradition on the right — join at the torso of the Middle Ages, a synthesis so deep and so generative that it has never fully dissolved. The arms extending from that torso are the Renaissance and the Reformation, two great movements of renovation, one looking back to Greece and Rome, the other looking back to the Hebrew scriptures and Paul. The head, rational and somewhat detached from the rest, is modernity — the period that thinks it has transcended what preceded it but cannot actually stand without the body below. This image does more than organize a course outline. It proposes a way of understanding ourselves as inheritors of a tradition whose tensions we still feel, whose questions we still argue about, and whose deepest sources most of us carry without quite knowing it.

The biblical strand begins with two lectures on the Hebrew Bible. The Book of Job arrives first, and rightly so: it is one of the most beautiful and disturbing texts ever written, and its central question — does Job serve God for nothing, or only for the rewards of a well-ordered life? — turns out to be a question about the nature of relationship itself. The lecture on Job is careful to resist the modern reflex of reading the book primarily as a meditation on the problem of evil. That problem is certainly there, but what the poetry of Job ultimately insists upon is something stranger and more intimate: a bond between two persons, Job and his God, so fundamental that neither can sever it. Job rages, challenges, and demands an advocate in heaven, and all the while he cannot stop talking to the very one he is raging at. That incapacity — that inability to let God go even in the darkest moment — is offered here as the text's deepest insight. The following lecture broadens the view from one man's story to an entire people's history. The covenant between Israel and the Lord God is described in terms that deliberately recall the language of a troubled marriage: passionate, quarrelsome, marked by promises that both bind and complicate. Israel's history of exile and return, of temple built and temple destroyed, of law given and law broken, is not a series of illustrations for some timeless moral lesson. It is the substance of the relationship itself. That history has a future — eschatology — because a love story that ends badly is no love story at all.

The New Testament lectures carry this story forward into the figure of Jesus and the theology of Paul. The discussion of the Synoptic Gospels is admirably clear-eyed about the contested scholarly terrain surrounding the historical Jesus, offering students the tools to navigate debates between revisionist and traditionalist accounts without pretending those debates are settled. What emerges is a picture of Jesus as a preacher of the kingdom of God in a specific, politically charged, and historically intelligible sense: a man who

healed, who invited the excluded to the table, who walked into the temple and acted like he owned it, and who was crucified for something that looked like sedition to a Roman governor. The Paul lecture then performs a clarification that is genuinely important: Paul's great controversy is not, in its original form, a dispute between Christians and Jews, but a dispute within the Christian community about whether Gentiles must become Jews in order to share in the covenant promises. Justification by faith is Paul's radical answer. The grace that makes this possible — free, unmerited, unequal in its distribution — carries within it the seeds of the long and anxious debate about predestination that will run from Paul through Augustine to Luther and Calvin.

The pivot to Plotinus is one of the course's most instructive moves. Here is the last great mind of pagan antiquity, writing in Rome in the third century CE, untouched in any substantial way by Jewish or Christian thought, yet producing a philosophy of inner unity, intellectual vision, and the soul's yearning return to its divine source that will become the backbone of Christian spirituality for over a millennium. The architecture of his universe — bodies, souls, divine intellect, and the One above all — offers a vocabulary and a map that Augustine, writing a century later, will transform by combining it with the biblical story of a God who speaks, promises, and loves. Augustine's lectures are the emotional and intellectual heart of Part II. His account of the will as love, of sin as the soul's infatuation with beautiful things that cannot satisfy it, of grace as the gift of falling in love with God, is neither cold doctrine nor sentimental piety. It is a phenomenology of the interior life that still rings true to readers who share none of his theological commitments.

Thomas Aquinas brings Aristotle back into this synthesis with extraordinary confidence and creativity. His adaptation of the four causes, his proofs from motion and contingency, his doctrine of

natural law and its hierarchy from eternal to human — these represent the high-water mark of the medieval project of uniting faith and reason as partners rather than opponents. The problem of universals then reminds us that even within this synthesis, fundamental questions about language, reality, and knowledge remained sharply disputed. Abelard's elegant conceptualism, Ockham's scorched-earth nominalism, and the theological stakes of both positions — these are not merely scholastic puzzles. They carry direct implications for Luther's theology and the coming fracture of Christendom.

The mystical tradition, represented here by Meister Eckhart, opens a different kind of inwardness: not Augustine's private inner world where one turns to look upward at God, but a depth at which the ground of the soul and the ground of God converge. Eckhart's boldness carries him to the edge of heresy, and perhaps beyond. The two Reformation lectures close the part with Luther's terrified conscience finding relief in the gospel's unconditional promise, and Calvin's systematic architecture — justification as a once-in-a-lifetime conversion, double predestination, the anxiety and assurance of the elect — showing how a theological difference of apparently fine distinction can reshape the religious psychology of whole civilizations for centuries to come.

Part II is, in the end, a story about what happens when the hunger for eternal truth meets the hunger for a personal God. That encounter has never produced complete peace. It has produced, instead, the most fertile tension in Western thought.

Lecture 13: Introduction

Professor Philip Carey

Welcome to Part Two

Welcome to Part Two of our course on great minds in the Western tradition. In Part Two we are going to look at two different segments of the Western tradition, beginning with what I will call the biblical tradition and proceeding through the biblical tradition to what we call the Middle Ages. The labels themselves are interesting, and I want to talk about them. But to do that, we have to talk about the whole shape of the Western tradition and what role these two segments — call them segments, call them parts — play within it.

What I would like to do is give you an image that will help you conceptualize the whole shape of the Western tradition. Picture the shape of the Western tradition as a body, where you have a right leg and a left leg, which I will call the biblical tradition and the classical tradition — Jerusalem and Athens, the Judeo-Christian tradition and the classical Greek and Roman traditions. The right leg and the left leg come together to form a torso, the Middle Ages, the middle of this body of the Western tradition. Then you have a left arm and a right arm, which I will suggest can be compared to the Renaissance and the Reformation respectively. And then there is the head — the ratiocinative part, the part that does all that thinking and analyzing — and that, I will suggest, is modernity.

Now, any way you describe the Western tradition is in itself a position on the Western tradition. How you should describe it is always a matter of controversy. So look critically at this description. Do not simply believe everything I tell you because I am the professor. But let us think about one fairly standard way of

conceptualizing the Western tradition through this image of the body.

The Two Legs: Jerusalem and Athens

The crucial notion that got me started on this image was the idea that two traditions flow together to form Western thought: the biblical tradition and the classical tradition, the tradition that comes from ancient Israel on the one hand, and the tradition that comes from Greece and Rome on the other.

Think of the biblical tradition first. I am comparing it to the right leg, because in many ways the Judeo-Christian strand of the Western tradition is the right-wing strand. In many ways, Christianity in particular was the source of respectability and of much social power for a great many centuries of Western history. There was a kind of Christian cultural hegemony for many, many centuries. So for much of the Western tradition, Christianity is the right wing — the right leg, if you will.

But it is also in many ways the strong leg. This is a right-handed culture and a right-legged culture. The legs are a motive force, and both legs are needed to drive our culture and move it forward. But the right leg is the stronger one, and this is because it is precisely the religious side of Western culture. Religion goes very deep in people's hearts and very deep in society and culture. Much of what drives people — especially in times of trouble, but also in times of prosperity — is religion.

Much also of the reforming urge of the Western tradition comes from this strong right leg. Think of how many of the people fighting slavery in America in the nineteenth century were doing so because of Christian convictions. Christianity is not simply a force for reaction and conservatism; it is also a force for change, precisely because it is

rooted so deeply in people's convictions. It is the kind of conviction people are willing to go out on a limb for, to stake their life on. It is a religious conviction. People are willing to die for their religion. That makes it very, very powerful.

Now let us look at the left leg. Think of the left leg as the leg that stems from Greek and Roman civilization, and especially from Greek philosophy, if we are focusing on the Western intellectual tradition. Think of all those secular intellectuals — people without strong religious convictions. There are a great many of them, and they tend to be left-wing. There are exceptions to that rule, but by and large secular intellectuals tend toward the left. Their hero, let us say, is Socrates — the man who is willing to question everything, who wants to ask questions about everything, who upset all those conservative traditional Athenians by asking: well, what do you mean by virtue? All those gentlemanly householders who were accustomed to educating their own sons because they knew what virtue was — Socrates comes to them and says, what is virtue? Do you know what it is? Give me a good answer and I will ask you some questions about it. And the questions are friendly, but very critical.

So the critical spirit of Western civilization tends to be — certainly not exclusively, but tends to be — a left-leg phenomenon: the phenomenon of asking questions that are not exactly subversive, but do undermine the sort of things you want to take for granted. Religion is often something you want to take for granted, especially in most traditional cultures. You grow up with a religion; you do not question it. Along comes Socrates, and he teaches you to ask questions. That is why I am suggesting you can think of the classical tradition as the left leg.

But which leg do you want to stand on? In a sense, I am more comfortable standing on the right leg, because the left leg is the leg of philosophy. Plato himself, of course, wanted philosophers to be

kings — but do you really want philosophers running things? I worry about that. Being an intellectual myself, I am not entirely sure I want intellectuals running the show. The right leg goes deeper into the part of ourselves that is prior to our thinking and our questioning, and that is a strong part of ourselves — the part so fundamental that it does not even occur to us to question it. That is why I call it the right leg. The left leg is the leg on which you stand and think: hmm, where do I want to go next? Is this really right? Maybe I should redefine this, think of it differently. The left leg is a little unstable in that way — very creative and critical, but a little unstable.

So think of those as the two motive forces of the Western tradition. You need them both. You do not want to let go of either one. Otherwise you are hopping around like someone with a disability. You want both legs in good working order — at least, most of us in the West do.

The Torso: The Middle Ages and Christendom

And that is because the two legs do come together. They join to support what I will call the torso — the Middle Ages, the era of what can also be called Christendom. This is the era in which Christianity had that cultural hegemony, starting in the late Roman Empire, round about 300 AD. We could actually date it from 312, when Constantine converted to Christianity. He was the Roman Empire, in a sense, and with his conversion Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire. It quickly became respectable, then very powerful, and then the dominant form of thought for the next millennium or so.

But here is a surprise. When you look at the structure of the Middle Ages and Christendom — especially the structure of power — you find that it can be described in terms that come from Plato's

Republic. In the Middle Ages, the structure of power was typically divided into three parts: the clergy, the nobility, and the commoners. This fits the three classes of Plato's *Republic*, and more or less explicitly and self-consciously it was meant to fit those three classes. The clergy are the philosopher-kings — those who have contemplated the ultimate truth and now come back down into the cave to teach it to the rest of us. The nobility are the warrior class, those whose job is to fight battles and to protect the rest of us. And the commoners are those who go about buying and selling and eating and drinking and doing the ordinary things that ordinary people do, and who need the guidance of the higher classes in order to live well.

So in Christendom, the philosophers did in effect rule — but they called themselves priests and bishops. They had absorbed a great deal of the philosophical ideal of the Greek world, especially the contemplative ideal: the ideal of getting out of the cave, out of the world of darkness and bodily involvement, to see the eternal truth that lies beyond bodies. That was what the clergy were supposed to be able to do. And many of them wanted to devote themselves full-time to it. Those who got the chance to do so were called monks. They went into monasteries and spent their time in full-time contemplation of the eternal truth, using not just Plato and Aristotle, of course, but primarily the Bible. But the whole notion of a contemplation of the truth — of going up there and seeing the truth about God — is very much a Greek notion.

So the monks wanted to live what was called the contemplative life, the life of *theoria* — Aristotle's word, from which we get our word *theory* — this vision of seeing eternal things. But what ended up happening is that they got dragged back down into the cave. For instance, the first monk ever made pope is Pope Gregory I, known as Gregory the Great. He did not want to be pope. He thought of being

pope as being dragged down from where he wanted to be. He wanted to remain up out of the cave, where he could contemplate. Instead, he was dragged back down where he had to run things.

This was in the seventh century AD, in Italy in a period of chaos. The Lombards were invading, there were battles everywhere, and there was no functioning central government. The central government was over in Byzantium and had little effective power in Italy. The most powerful man in Italy at the time was the Pope — the only man who could organize things, repair aqueducts, and make sure the harvests came in on time. So the pope had to be a good administrator; he had to run things, or else people were going to starve. They took this very bright and well-organized monk who would rather have been contemplating eternal truth and said: you are going to have to run things in Italy, because otherwise we will die. Rule over us. And this is precisely what Plato thought you should do with philosopher-kings: let them contemplate the truth for a while, then drag them back into the cave and make them rule. In many ways the medieval world is the embodiment of what Plato was suggesting in the *Republic*.

But of course, that is too one-sided, because I have just left out the Bible and Christianity — which is also part of the story, the major part of the story, in fact. What I am suggesting, and this is a common suggestion, is that in the thought of the Middle Ages we find a synthesis of faith and reason, philosophy and theology, the thinking of the Greeks and the thinking that comes from Israel and the Bible.

There are several ways of thinking about this synthesis. One is the formula *faith seeks understanding*, which is probably the most popular formula among medieval thinkers. You start with faith — that is, you believe what the Bible teaches you — and then you inquire in a more or less Socratic way. You ask critical questions and try to find out more about the truths of the faith with which you

began. That is one key model for the synthesis of faith and reason in the Middle Ages.

Another model, a little later in the High Middle Ages around the time of Thomas Aquinas, is the model of philosophy as the *handmaid of theology*. Philosophy teaches us to think carefully with concepts; it teaches us logic. Theology, meanwhile, is the discipline whose ultimate goal is the contemplation of God. But as we learn theology we need to learn things like logic and clear thinking, and we need to learn how to construct a good argument. Philosophy is a handmaid who provides that service.

Notice that in this second model, philosophy comes first because it is secondary — it is the foundation. Theology is the crown of all the disciplines. In the first model, faith comes first and the fulfillment of our rational nature is second because it is the culmination. So there is a great deal going on as the philosophers of the Middle Ages juggle faith and reason and think about the various ways they might go together. They are almost all committed to integrating faith and reason, but they have different models for how it might be done.

The Arms: Renaissance and Reformation

That is the torso. Let me briefly mention the left arm and the right arm.

The left arm is the Renaissance. I am calling it a left arm because it owes more to the Greeks and the Romans than to Israel and the Bible. It owes something to both — all of Western culture from about the third and fourth centuries on owes something to both Israel and the Bible — but the Renaissance can be thought of as a reclaiming and renovation of the classical tradition. It involved, among other things, a new and renewed mastery of the classical languages, Greek and Latin.

The right arm is the Reformation — the Protestant Reformation. We will be looking at Luther and Calvin a little later on. They are the two great theological leaders of the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century, and their movement was clearly aimed at a reclaiming and renovation of the biblical tradition, a return to the Bible.

But those figures, too, owed a great deal to the classical tradition. Just as the Renaissance owed a good deal to the Bible, so the Reformation owed a great deal to the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle — more, perhaps, than the reformers would want to admit. That is actually one of the interesting features of the story: how much Christians owe to Plato and Aristotle, more certainly than Luther or Calvin would have wanted to acknowledge.

The Head: Modernity

And then there is the head — modernity. Modernity is where we are, where we see from, where our eyes are. If we want to look at our toes, we have to look from way up here, looking way down there. This means that when we are studying Plato and Aristotle, we are studying from a considerable distance, using modern scholarship, modern translations — texts that are punctuated and have spaces between the words, unlike ancient texts, which have neither. We are looking at the ancient world from a great distance, but with amazingly powerful tools. We have good eyes. We have very powerful scholarship that helps us understand the ancient world.

I will suggest that modernity is a little bit like Christendom secularized. Christendom — the Middle Ages — is that torso, that central feature of the Western intellectual tradition that makes the West distinctive from other traditions. I think the Middle Ages is what makes us a distinctive tradition. That is a controversial view, but we

will see what you think. Modernity rests on top of that torso, rests on top of that middle part. Modernity is impossible without the Middle Ages. Modernity is what happens when Christendom gets secularized — when habits of thought that arose from this combination of the classical tradition and the Judeo-Christian tradition then become secularized.

I think we are still heirs of the Middle Ages. We could not be who we are if we were not. The crucial feature of modernity, at least intellectually and when viewed from the standpoint of the Middle Ages, is that faith and reason no longer look like partners. Reason no longer looks like a handmaid to theology. Faith and reason start looking more like antagonists than partners. When people think about reason and philosophy in the modern world, they think of a challenge to faith rather than a partner to it. That is typical of the modern world beginning, say, with Descartes in the seventeenth century. We will see that when we get to those lectures: reason becomes increasingly critical of faith, and faith comes to look more and more like an escape from reason — something other than reason, something that needs to be separated from reason, that might tie us to some deep pre-rational truth, some feeling prior to reason, or perhaps something mystical, or perhaps something simply irrational. That split between faith and reason is the hallmark of the modern world.

The Structure of the Middle Ages: A Closer Look

Now let us say a little more about the characteristics of the torso — the Middle Ages — which will be one of our central concerns, and which I am suggesting is right at the center of the Western tradition.

It begins in the late Roman Empire. We can mark it with the conversion of Constantine at the beginning of the fourth century AD.

That fourth century AD, more than any other century, is when these two traditions really start to come together. And they come together — one leg and the other — at the bottom of the torso, at a place that is generative and also, frankly, a little embarrassing. There is something going on when these two traditions come together that is profoundly fruitful, full of future possibility, but also hard and even uncomfortable to talk about. This, as it happens, is my specialty: talking about what goes on when these two traditions come together. People are touchy about it. People do not want to admit that Western reason has been so deeply interlaced with Western faith. And Christians and Jews often do not want to admit how much their faith has been intertwined with Western reason and Western philosophy. I think they are deeply intertwined, and we are a little embarrassed about it.

That intertwining was in fact resisted by certain puritanical Christians. The most famous is Tertullian, a Church Father — a Latin Christian writer who died in the third century AD — who is famous for asking: what does Athens have to do with Jerusalem? The expected answer was: nothing. Athens belongs over there with Plato and Aristotle, Jerusalem belongs over here with Christ and Moses, and they have nothing to do with each other. But this was, in fact, a minority opinion among Christian scholars.

Christian thinkers, from the very beginning of this torso I am describing, wanted to combine both the story of the God of Israel — and I will suggest that what you have in the Bible above all is a story about a person — with the categories they had learned from the Greeks, the categories of metaphysics. So there is a combination here of story and metaphysics, of history and metaphysics: the timeless thoughts of Greek metaphysics, the thought about true being and true essence, on the one hand, and on the other this story about a God who rescues his people. Most Christian thinkers wanted

to hold both together — to use the metaphysical categories to understand the story, but to use the story to show the concrete meaning of the metaphysics.

Tertullian himself was really left behind in this regard. In fact, Tertullian was an opponent of Plato — he named Plato the source of all the great heresies. He may have been right about some things. But he abandoned Plato and went with the Stoics. The problem is, there is no escaping philosophy if you are in the West. So he ended up allying himself with Stoic philosophy, and his remark about Athens and Jerusalem was really directed against Plato specifically. But the Stoics, you see, were materialists. They thought that both God and the soul were made of material stuff — that both God and the soul were made of a divine fire. And this materialist view of God and the soul is precisely what the great Christian thinkers who followed Tertullian ended up rejecting. They wanted a non-materialistic account of both God and the soul. And to achieve that, they turned to Plato — to the dualist philosophy of the *Phaedo*, which I discussed in an earlier lecture.

The Church Fathers did a number of other things as well. They worked out a non-materialistic account of God and the soul. They also worked out an account of God that is distinctively Christian: the doctrine of the Trinity, God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. To do that, they had to borrow further language from the Greek metaphysical tradition. They spoke of the Son of God — that is, Christ — being of one *essence* with the Father. That is a piece of metaphysical language you do not find in the Bible, which the Church Fathers found useful for defining who God was. So there is this creative combination of Greek thinking and biblical language about God. The talk about God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit comes from the Bible; the talk about being of one essence with the Father comes from the Greeks. The basic story is the biblical story, but some

of the categories used to understand it — especially the categories used to understand the eternal nature of God — come from the Greeks.

After all, the Greeks might have been right about some things. It is quite possible that Plato and Aristotle were right about a few things, even if they did not know the biblical God. At least, that is what most Christian thinkers ended up concluding.

The Corridor of the Middle Ages

That marks off the torso at one end, at its beginning. At the other end, there is modernity — which you can mark off as the period of what one book calls a rebellion against authority, or a flight from authority. Modernity wants to escape from religious authority and think for itself.

The original meaning of authority, by the way, was a pedagogical meaning rather than a political one. Authority belonged to teachers rather than to rulers. It meant the authority of, say, a clergyman to tell you what to believe. The modern view, by contrast, is encapsulated in something my students say all the time: you cannot tell me what to believe. No one can tell me what to believe. Whereas the entire job of a priest or a bishop in the Middle Ages was precisely to tell people what to believe. That is what authority meant: the right of a teacher to tell people what to believe. And faith meant believing what you were told, believing what you were taught. That is why, for the great thinkers of the Middle Ages, you start with faith and move toward understanding. You are not supposed to stay at the level of merely believing in authority; you are supposed to learn to understand. But you start by believing what you are taught. You start with faith.

For the modern period, much of the Middle Ages looks like a period dominated by religious authority. But I also think it looks, for many people, like the period of the heart. Many times when we look for some deep inner truth that goes deeper than our thoughts and deeper than our arguments — some feeling that is more fundamental than thinking — many times what we find when we look for that is something that was already articulated in the Middle Ages. Our heart lies there, many times.

The Middle Ages as Middle

The Middle Ages can be thought of as *middle* in several senses.

They are the connector between the ancient world and the modern world. Our access to Plato and Aristotle, as to the Bible, comes through the Middle Ages. Without that connection, these books — Plato, Aristotle, the Bible — are simply things we are looking at from a distance, like looking at someone else's foot. But if we are looking at our own legs, we see them through this connection, which makes these books the books that actually shape us.

So the Middle Ages are middle in the sense that they connect the ancient world — both the ancient world of Greece and the ancient world of Israel — to the modern world. If Athens and Jerusalem are in our bloodstream, it is because of this connection through the great torso. The Middle Ages are also middle in the sense that that is where all the vital organs are — all those things that are partly hidden from us, the aspects of our tradition that shape us without our quite recognizing what they are, and which look rather messy when we dissect them, but which are also the aspects of ourselves that we feel most strongly when we stop thinking and simply feel with our gut. Much of our gut, I think, is medieval. See what you think when we have had a chance to discuss the Middle Ages.

And the Middle Ages are middle in the sense of central. To tell the story of the Middle Ages is to walk down the central corridor of Western thought.

Let me walk down that corridor very briefly to anticipate what we will be doing in the coming lectures. The corridor starts, as I suggested, with late antiquity — when Athens and Jerusalem come together, beginning especially with Constantine's conversion to Christianity, which made Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire.

Late antiquity becomes the early Middle Ages, also known as the Dark Ages. There is a reason for that label. Knowledge of Greek was lost in the West. The texts of Aristotle were lost. Most of the texts of Plato were lost. There were very few people who could read and understand the ancient texts, including very few who had a sophisticated understanding of the Bible. It was a time of darkness in the sense that it was not a time of great learning and scholarship. Those Dark Ages span, let us say, from roughly the sixth century up through about the eleventh century AD.

At around the beginning of the twelfth century we enter what is typically called the High Middle Ages, sometimes even the Medieval Renaissance. The great texts of the classical world returned to the West through the civilization of Islam, which had conquered much of the Mediterranean world in the seventh century, including all of North Africa, and formed a frontier with the Western world. Plato, Aristotle, and other ancient texts had been kept alive in Byzantium, the eastern part of the Roman Empire. From there they passed into Islamic civilization, were translated into Arabic, and from there traveled through North Africa and into Spain, where they once again entered the West — originally in the form of Arabic translations — and returned to the Western bloodstream in the twelfth century. This stimulated the kind of thinking we call scholasticism, the kind of thinking we find in Thomas Aquinas. Aquinas, in the thirteenth

century, is engaging with the full corpus of Aristotle's works — or rather, he is the second generation of thinkers to have the whole corpus of Aristotle available to him.

Then in the fourteenth century, after this high medieval renaissance, disaster strikes: the Black Death, the bubonic plague, the Hundred Years' War — war, devastation, and a real setback for medieval civilization.

We will be looking especially at this High Middle Ages. And then we will go beyond the fourteenth century to look at the Protestant Reformation.

What Lies Outside the Corridor

Let us look briefly at what lies outside the central corridor, because it is interesting to think about what is not part of the main story.

On one side of the corridor, I would identify what I call the twin brother of the Western tradition: the Eastern Christian tradition, the tradition of Eastern Orthodoxy, located in Byzantium and Constantinople, and which eventually migrated to Russia in the form of the Russian Orthodox tradition. A little further east and to the south, on the borders of the Western tradition, lies Islam, which becomes important as the transmitter of the classical heritage in the twelfth century.

Then there is what I will call the forgotten older brother: the Jewish people, who are present throughout the entire period we call Christendom and who have a quite different perspective on it. Christendom is the majority tradition, and Jews always have to figure out what to do about that. The challenge of assimilation on the one hand, or ghettoization on the other — and what alternatives might exist between those poles — is a crucial and perennial issue for

Jewish identity, precisely because Christianity has become so central to the Western tradition.

And finally, think of what I will call the silent sister: the women we do not hear much from in this story. Although there are a fair number of women who are important in the Middle Ages, including significant mystics and abbesses — leaders of female monasticism.

So that is our shape, our body of the Western tradition. And we need to launch into it by turning to the right foot on which much of Western culture stands — the Hebrew Bible.

Lecture 14: Job and the Problem of Suffering

Professor Philip Carey

The Book of Job: An Introduction

In this lecture, we turn to the single most important text of the Western tradition: the text called the Bible. We are going to start with the Hebrew portion of the Bible, which Christians call the Old Testament, and which Jews simply call the Bible or Scripture. We will look, to begin with, at one of the strangest books of the Hebrew Bible, because it is not about Israel — which most of the Hebrew Bible is about — but about, well... what is it about? That is hard to say. I would like to start simply by telling some of the story, and then we will talk about what the story is about.

The Frame Narrative

The story begins with a man named Job. He is introduced right at the beginning as a man who is blameless and upright. He fears God and shuns evil. To fear God means to honor and reverence him, and to avoid doing the things that offend God. In addition to being blameless and upright, Job is also rich. He is well off. He has a large family, which is actually a form of wealth in those days. He has large herds and flocks, and things prosper. Herds and flocks are the fundamental form of wealth in this early period of the Bible. So he is well off, he is prospering, everything is well with him. He is a good man and he is doing well.

Now the scene shifts to heaven. What we see there are the sons of God, as they are called in Hebrew — we might call them angels; people in the ancient world would have called them gods with a small *g*. They come to the royal throne upon which sits the Most

High God. He is called the Lord. That is actually his name, not his title, and we will get to that in the next lecture. The Lord is a name. He is a particular god, the Most High God, to whom all the other gods are subordinate. He is the only god the Israelites worship, of course. All these sons of God have gathered around this royal court, which is structured very much like a royal court in the ancient Near East. And there is one among them who is very peculiar — the only one who has a name. He is called *Ha-Satan*. It is actually not a name but a title. It seems to mean something like "the accuser" or "the prosecuting attorney." *Ha-Satan* — that is the Hebrew word from which we get our word Satan. But he does not seem to be a devil. He seems to be one of the sons of God, one of this court circle, in good standing, though of a rather cynical and nasty character.

The Lord asks him, where have you been? And he replies, oh, I have been up and down the earth, roaming around to see what is there. The Lord — the Most High God sitting on the throne — then says: have you seen my servant Job, a man blameless and upright? He fears God and shuns evil. These words echo the introductory description of Job. God brags about Job. And the accuser is unconvinced, of course — that is part of his function in the story. His reply is: well, does Job fear God for nothing?

The implication is: look, yes, he is a good man, he is blameless and upright, I will admit that, I cannot argue with you there. But you are paying him off, God. You are rewarding him for all that goodness. Look at how he is prospering. But does Job fear God for nothing? The speech continues: have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land. Just stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face.

So a challenge is issued. The accuser is challenging the Lord God and saying: all right, he is a good man, but you are paying him off. What would happen if you did not? And so the Lord accepts the challenge. There is a kind of bet between the accuser and the Lord God. What would Job do if he were not rewarded for being such a good man? What would Job do if he were a good man and everything went wrong?

Subsequently, we return to earth, and everything goes wrong for Job. In a series of catastrophes, he loses his herds, his flocks, his camels. And then, last of all, he loses his children, all of whom are feasting in a house when a wind from God comes in from the desert, blows the house down, and kills them all. When Job gets the news, that is the crucial test. He gets up, tears his robe — a sign of mourning — and shaves his head, another sign of mourning. Then he utters some famous words. He falls to the ground, he worships, and he says: *Naked came I from my mother's womb, and naked will I return. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord*. The crucial test was whether Job would curse God's name. Instead, Job blesses the name of the Lord.

So, back to heaven, where the sons of God are once again gathering around the throne. The accuser comes before God, and God is once again bragging about Job, repeating the same words almost as if to drive the point home: have you seen my servant Job? He is blameless and upright, he fears God and shuns evil. Nothing has changed about Job. He has maintained his integrity — and he has maintained his integrity, God adds, even though you incited me against him to ruin him for nothing, for no reason. That word again: *for nothing*.

The accuser has a reply: skin for skin. All that a man has, he will give for his life. Just stretch out your hand again and touch his flesh and bones — you have kept his body safe — but now touch him in his own flesh and he will curse you to your face. So the Lord accepts the

bet again. We go back down to earth, and Job contracts a revolting skin disease that is not only painful but disgusting and repulsive. It makes Job disgusted with himself, and everyone else recoils from him.

And now the test is really on, because Job starts getting advice. First and most famously, his wife comes to him and says: are you still maintaining your integrity? Why do you not just curse God and die? That is the opposite, of course, of fearing God and living — it is to curse God and die. Job replies: you are talking like a fool. Shall we accept good from God and not evil? And in all this, Job did not sin in what he said, says the text. He does not curse God.

Then comes more advice, which brings more trouble for Job. Three friends — also called three comforters in the text — come to him. But when they see him from afar, they can hardly recognize him. They weep aloud, tear their robes, and sprinkle dust on their heads as a sign of mourning. They sit down on the ground, and the first thing they do is simply sit there for seven days in silence, so astonished and so horrified are they by his suffering.

That is the opening scene — the first two chapters of the forty-two chapters of the book of Job. That is the frame story. I want to return to it, but first we need to think a little about what this story is going on about.

Theodicy and the Real Question

When modern readers encounter the book of Job, they often think this is a story about the problem of evil, the problem of suffering, or *theodicy* as it is called. Theodicy means the business of justifying God — that is what the Greek word means. It is a technical term for what we call the problem of suffering: why in the world does God allow this kind of suffering? How could a just and merciful and loving God

allow this? It is a very modern problem, and it is hard not to see it in the book of Job. I think it is not primarily what the book of Job is about, although it is one of the things the book is about.

The point is this: if the book of Job is about the problem of suffering, then it has already been given the only answer it is going to give — why does suffering happen? Because God has a bet with Satan. This is not a satisfactory answer, and that is precisely why I think the text is not primarily trying to give that answer to that problem. It has other issues it is concerned with.

The question, I think, is really about Job's relationship with God. This is a reading of the book of Job that I have learned from the great theologian Karl Barth, and I think he is right: what is really going on in the book of Job is a question about the nature of the relationship between Job and God. Does Job serve God for nothing — freely, as it were? Or is he only in it to get paid? Is he only in it for the goodies, like a child who only obeys his parents in order to get cookies? Is that the kind of righteousness and blamelessness that Job has? Or is there something deeper about this relationship? That, I will suggest, is what the book is about. It is what makes sense of the whole sweep of the text, because if the whole text of the book of Job is simply an answer to the problem of suffering, then it is a woefully inadequate answer.

The Structure of the Book

Having looked at the first two chapters, let me say a little about the structure of the book of Job as a whole. These first two chapters are a prose narrative — written in prose — whereas most of the book is written in poetry. They take the form of something like a folk tale. The folk tale is actually split in two: the first two chapters are the first part of the tale, and the last portion of the final chapter is its

conclusion. If you took that conclusion and placed it directly after the first two chapters, you would have a complete folk narrative about this bet between God and the accuser and Job. But then in the middle are thirty-nine chapters of magnificent poetry — the heart and soul of the book of Job — where the real depth of the book resides. If there is a great mind at work in the book of Job, it is at work primarily in that magnificent poetry.

The usual scholarly view is that a great poet — who will forever remain nameless to us — saw this folk tale, recognized the potential in it, and decided to write a poem expanding what goes on in the tale, placing that poem in the middle of the narrative. It is simply amazing poetry, which we will come to in a moment. I want to note that there is a slight tension between the content of the poetry and the folk tale surrounding it — a tension that I think is deliberately there. I believe the poet intended that tension to be something we experience as we read the text.

The poetry begins as a series of alternating speeches, or cycles of speeches. Job speaks, one of his three friends replies, then Job replies again, then another friend, and so forth. That pattern continues for a while. Then, around chapter 32, a fifth person jumps in: a young man named Elihu, who is furious at the three friends for doing such a poor job in what they have said to Job. He delivers a long set of speeches. And then the final speaker is, of course, God himself, who jumps into the discussion and has a great deal to say. And then, at the very end, Job repents in dust and ashes.

Throughout the poetic section, Job has been challenging God, while the three friends have been saying: oh, do not say that, Job. Elihu says: you should not say that, Job. And then God says: who are you? You do not know what you are talking about. And Job says: who am I? I do not know what I am talking about. I repent in dust and ashes. That is the plot of the poetic section.

Let me mention a couple of notable features of this central section. The accuser never appears again — not even in the prose narrative at the end. Ha-Satan, the accuser, simply drops out of the whole story. He is needed to get things started, but he is not what the story is about. The story of Job is not a story about how Satan is the source of evil. The accuser is needed to generate some dramatic momentum, but the story is about something else, as I have been suggesting.

Another striking thing about the poetic section is that the events of the frame narrative are never really referred to in the poetry. The poet who wrote this clearly knew the frame narrative, but he does not reference it. When Job speaks of his suffering, he does not speak about the loss of his wealth, his flocks, his herds. He does not speak about the loss of his children. He does not even speak about his aching body. Something else seems to be eating him — and what that something is, I think, is the crucial topic of the book of Job.

Job's Speeches: The Darkness

Let us go back to this magnificent poetry and listen to it a bit. And to listen to it, you have to start by listening to the silence — seven days of silence while three friends sit with Job on an ash heap and mourn with him, overwhelmed by the sight of his suffering. Try to imagine seven days of silence.

And now listen to how Job breaks it. After this, Job opens his mouth and curses the day of his birth. Notice: he does not curse God, but he curses the day of his birth. Here is how it goes:

May the day of my birth perish, and the night that said 'a boy is born.' That day — may it turn to darkness. May God above not care about it. May no light shine upon it. May darkness and the shadow of death claim it once more.

Why did I not perish at birth and die as I came from the womb? Why were there knees to receive me and breasts that I might be nursed? For now I would be lying down in peace — the peace of the grave — I would be asleep and at rest with kings and counselors of the earth who built for themselves palaces that now lie in ruins.

Or why was I not hidden in the ground like a stillborn child, like an infant who never saw the light of day? There — in the grave — the wicked cease from turmoil, and there the weary are at rest. Captives also enjoy their ease. They no longer hear the slave driver's shout. The small and the great are there, and the slave is freed from his master. Why is light given to those in misery, and life to the bitter of soul, to those who long for death that does not come, who search for it more than for hidden treasure? Why is life given to a man whose way is hidden, whom God has hedged in?

Strong words indeed. Job wants to die. In fact, he wants more than to die — he wishes he had never been born. He wants nonexistence for himself. He wishes that his own existence had not been. It is hard to imagine a more thorough rejection of God's act of creation. I do not want to be. God made this world and I want no part of it. I want darkness, not light. I want death, not life. Just let me go.

The Three Friends and Their Clichés

This is deeply offensive to Job's friends. They are willing for Job to play certain roles, but not this one. Let me introduce the way they speak by reading from chapter 4, where we hear the first of Job's friends, Eliphaz.

Here is his reply to Job:

If someone ventures a word with you, will you be impatient? But who can keep from speaking? Think how you have instructed many people,

how you have strengthened feeble hands. Your words have supported those who stumbled. You have strengthened faltering knees.

Your words used to be strong words that helped people — but these words are different, he is suggesting.

But now trouble comes to you and you are discouraged. It strikes you and you are dismayed. Should not your piety be your confidence and your blameless ways your hope? Consider now: who, being innocent, has ever perished? Where were the upright ever destroyed? As I have observed, those who plow evil and those who sow trouble reap it. At the breath of God they are destroyed. At the blast of his anger, they perish.

This is a typical pious view that you can find elsewhere in Scripture. Job himself actually agrees with this as a general rule. God rewards the good and punishes the evil. Of course I know that, Job will say elsewhere. I have told this to people myself. This is the received wisdom of Hebrew thought, and it is true in a general sense. The friends of Job are a little like those well-meaning people who come when you are grieving — perhaps you have lost someone you love — and what they say is clichés: hang on, have faith, it is going to be okay, it will turn out all right in the end. All those clichés which are, in a sense, true: it will turn out in the end; you will get through it. But hearing that in the moment does not help. The general truisms do not speak to where you actually are. And Job is furious at these people because, while he is perfectly willing to admit the general truth — yes, of course God rewards the good; of course he punishes the wicked — he cannot avoid the reality of where he is: a good man who wants to die.

That is what is unacceptable to Job's comforters. In what is called the wisdom tradition of Israel, the wisdom tradition honors the wisdom of God in creating the world, ordering it, and rewarding the good

and punishing the wicked. This means a good man should be confident that God is going to reward him. A good man does not serve God for nothing — as the accuser might say. The good man is supposed to trust that God will take care of him; the evil man is supposed to fear God, repent, and then receive forgiveness. What could be more straightforward?

But Job will not accept either role. He is a good man who wants to die. A good man who has nothing to repent of, who would rather die than live. And that is totally unacceptable to his friends. Job has two options according to them: you can be a good man and be confident that God will take care of you, feeling safe and hopeful; or you can be a bad man, admit your sins, repent, be forgiven, and live. But Job refuses both options.

The Development of Job's Speeches

Let us look at Job's speeches a bit more carefully, because what ends up happening in the poetry is a development in Job's thinking as he gets deeper into the issues and the argument with his friends.

Remember how Job's initial speech addressed no one. He cursed the day of his birth, but he was not talking to his friends, and he was not talking to God. It was, in a sense, solipsistic — just Job sitting in his misery, wanting to die, not talking to anybody. But now he is drawn into a dialogue by this challenge from his friends.

The crucial starting point of that dialogue is that Job refuses to play the two roles his friends want him to play. He insists on telling his story his own way, which fits neither of their clichés. So Job speaks out and says: listen to me. Look at what is happening here. Look at where I am.

In chapter 6, for instance, he says:

If only my anguish could be weighed and all my misery be placed on the scales, it would surely outweigh the sand of the sea. Your calculations, my friends, do not fit. My grief is too much to fit into your nice calculations. No wonder my words have been impetuous. The arrows of the Almighty are in me. My spirit drinks in their poison. God's terrors are marshaled against me.

He is not blaming the accuser. He does not know anything about the accuser. It is God that he has his quarrel with. And it turns out that God accepts this — the buck stops with God in the Bible, not with Satan.

Job wants people to hear him, to understand where he is. But ultimately he wants not just his friends to hear him — he wants God to hear him. In chapter 7, he turns to God and says:

Remember, O God, that my life is but a breath. My eyes will never see happiness again. The eye that now sees me will see me no longer. You will look for me, but I will be no more. Therefore I will not keep silent. I will speak out in the anguish of my spirit. I will complain in the bitterness of my soul. Am I the sea or the monster of the deep that you put me under guard? What is a man, that you make so much of him, that you give him so much attention, that you examine him every morning and test him every moment? Will you never look away from me or let me alone for even an instant? If I have sinned, what have I done to you, O watcher of men? Why have you made me your target? Have I become a burden to you? Why do you not pardon my offenses and forgive my sins? For I will soon lie down in the dust. You will search for me, but I will be no more.

Just let up for a moment. Leave me alone so I can draw a breath before I go off into the shadow of death.

That is a recurring theme, and it is so powerful that I want to read another passage on it, from chapter 10:

Are not my few days almost over? Turn away from me so I can have a moment's joy before I go to the place of no return, to the land of gloom and the shadow of death, to the land of deepest night, of the shadow of death and disorder, where even the light is like darkness.

Just leave me alone. That is the deepest moment of Job's despair. He wants God to look away, to stop paying attention to him, to just let him die in peace. Let him get a breath before he goes off into the land of the shadow of death. That is the darkest point in the book of Job.

The Optimism of Job

But inseparable from that darkness, it turns out, is what I will call the optimism of Job. Notice what Job is actually doing. He is telling God to leave him alone — but he is talking to God while he says it. He is saying: *you* — I want your attention. Leave me alone. *You* — I am going to talk to you. You have to listen to me. Leave me alone. Job cannot let God go.

That, I think, is one of the key themes in this poetry. Even when he is telling God to leave him alone, he cannot let God go, because he is telling God to leave him alone. He never simply turns away from God and ignores him. He never forgets about God. He cannot possibly forget about God, because he is so deeply aware that God has not forgotten about him.

Here comes the optimistic strand. Let me introduce it by reading from chapter 9:

How then can I dispute with him? How can I find words to argue with God? Though I were innocent, I could not answer him. I could only plead with my judge for mercy. Even if I summoned him and he responded, I do not believe he would give me a hearing. He would

crush me with a storm and multiply my wounds for no reason — for nothing. He would not let me regain my breath, but would overwhelm me with misery.

He wants to bring his case before God, but God's majesty would simply crush him. And then a little later:

He is not a man like me that I might answer him, that we might confront each other in court. If only there were someone to arbitrate between us, to lay his hand upon us both, someone to remove God's rod from me so that his terror would frighten me no more — then I would speak up without fear of him. But as it stands now with me, I cannot.

Think of this as an act of imagination by Job. He imagines someone who can stand in judgment between God and him. That is an amazing thing to imagine, because of course the Lord God is the supreme high judge — and the problem is that he is also the judge in his own cause. So who can stand between them? Who can arbitrate between God and Job?

But Job continues to develop this imagining. In chapter 16, verse 19, he actually affirms that such an arbitrator exists, in an amazing act of what I am calling the optimism of Job:

Even now my witness is in heaven, my advocate is on high, my intercessor is my friend. As my eyes pour out tears to God on behalf of a man, he pleads with God as a man pleads for his friend.

And then most famously of all — in a passage where the Hebrew is very difficult and the translation is contested, but here is the traditional rendering:

I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God.

He is imagining someone in heaven who can stand before God and arbitrate between them — so that he can, as it were, sue God, file a lawsuit against God, with a good advocate, someone who is not merely an attorney but a judge between him and God.

The amazing irony here, in my view, is that Job is right. He does have someone in heaven who speaks for him, who pleads for him as a friend pleads with a friend. We have seen this already in the first chapter of the book. The one who pleads for Job, the one who speaks on his behalf and vindicates him, is God himself — the Lord God, who says: have you seen my servant Job? He is blameless and upright. It is because he has that advocate in heaven that he is now in the pickle he is in. That is the deep irony of the text. Job wants — imagines, scarcely dares to hope for — this advocate in heaven. And indeed he has that advocate, and that is precisely why he is where he is now.

Think of that as an approach to the problem of evil.

God Speaks from the Whirlwind

But that is not the end of the story. The end of the story is, of course, deeply unsatisfying. God arrives in chapter 38, and just as Job predicted, he is overwhelming. Job cannot answer him. God speaks out of a whirlwind and answers Job without answering his questions — without answering them at all. Here is God's initial speech:

Who is this that darkens my counsel with words without knowledge? Brace yourself like a man. I will question you, and you shall answer me. Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? Tell me, if you understand. Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know. Who stretched a measuring line across it? On what were its footings set? Who laid its cornerstones, when the morning stars sang together and

all the sons of God shouted for joy? Who shut up the sea behind doors when it burst forth from the womb?

The crucial act of creation in the Hebrew Bible is for God to set limits to the sea so that it does not overwhelm the land as it did in Noah's flood. That is what establishes the fundamental order of creation, allowing human beings to live on dry land — when God says to the sea: this far you may come and no farther. The speech goes on to speak of all the things God did in creating the world, and especially the magnificent and terrifying creatures he created. It reaffirms the wisdom of God in creating the universe. But it does not answer Job's questions at all, just as Job predicted.

He summoned God, he made his lawsuit, and God has come — but all God does is ask Job questions that Job cannot answer. And so Job concedes, in two brief speeches:

I am unworthy. How can I reply to you? I put my hand over my mouth. I spoke once, but I have no answer. Twice, but I will say no more.

And finally: *My ears had heard of you, but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes.*

What is happening here? Is Job being terrified by God and cowed, simply surrendering to superior force? Is he a man of wisdom now recognizing his limits for the first time? Or is he committing his life to God and trusting in him as the one who ordered the universe? There are at least three possible interpretations. You decide. Much of how you read the text depends on how you resolve that question.

The Prose Conclusion

And then, finally, comes the anticlimax: the prose narrative at the end, where Job is rewarded with twice as many flocks and herds as before, and the same number of children as before. The man who

was not serving God for reward gets rewarded for it. In the end, I suppose the story has to end that way — God has to vindicate Job. And in fact, in the prose narrative, God says to the three friends: you did not speak of me the way you should have. My servant Job — he spoke of me as he should.

God vindicates Job at the end, declaring that Job spoke rightly of him. Job, who complained so bitterly, spoke rightly of God, rather than the friends who simply uttered clichés. That is a striking thing, and I will leave it with you to think about.

Conclusion: A Relationship That Cannot End

The texture and structure of this text, all its puzzles, all its magnificence, all its unsolved problems — I simply want to point out, at the end, that there is a relationship here that holds the whole thing together. One of the lessons of the story is that the relationship does not end. Job cannot end it. God cannot end it. These two are bound to each other, and they are in it for nothing, for free, for grace. The phrase *for nothing*, which recurs throughout the text, is a phrase about grace — about something gratuitous. They are doing this simply because this is who they are. Job cannot help but be God's servant. God cannot help but brag about Job. They are together. This is a relationship that is going to last, one way or another.

And that is why Job is a great introduction to the Old Testament as a whole. The Old Testament — the Hebrew Bible — is a book about two parties having a relationship. Those parties are Israel and God. Israel is a whole nation, but it is really the main character of the Hebrew Bible alongside God. And it is a relationship very much like Job's relationship with God: a relationship structured by a covenant of promises that binds these two characters together so that they

cannot let go of each other. And that is what we need to look at in our next lecture.

Lecture 15: The Hebrew Bible and Covenantal History

Professor Philip Carey

The Analogy Between Job and Israel

In this lecture, we pass from a very remarkable book within the Hebrew Bible — the book of Job — to look at the shape of the Hebrew Bible as a whole. I am suggesting that there is an analogy between the shape of the book of Job and the shape of the Hebrew Bible as a whole. Both of them are stories about a relationship: a very troubled, very deep, and very inescapable relationship. On the one hand, there is the relationship between Job and God. On the other, there is the relationship between Israel and the Lord God. Israel really is the main character of the Hebrew Bible together with God, and the Hebrew Bible is the story of their relationship.

The Covenant: Structure and History

This relationship has a structure, and it gets that structure from the covenant — the notion of a mutual exchange of promises between a superior and an inferior, between a lord and a vassal. The word for covenant could cover what would happen when a vassal swore allegiance to a lord. And in later books of the Hebrew Bible, this relationship is compared to the bond between husband and wife. Imagine a very passionate but also rather quarrelsome marriage — the kind of marriage where husband and wife cannot stop fighting with each other and loving each other, and can never let each other go. So this relationship has a structure given by the covenant, which we will discuss a bit more shortly, but it also has a history. It has a

story, the way any marriage has a story. And the Hebrew Bible, I will suggest, is something like the story of this relationship.

Because it has a story, the Hebrew Bible is fundamentally about faith rather than about reason. That is the crucial contrast that shapes so much of Western thought. Reason is not absent from the Hebrew Bible, but it is not the central theme the way it is for Plato and Aristotle. Faith is the central theme for several reasons. You have to believe in the person you are in a relationship with — it is a relationship of faith and trust, or else it is nothing at all. And if you want to be part of it, or even understand it, you have to hear the story. If you want to know who the people in the story are, you have to believe it. That is, if you want to know who the God of the Bible is, if you want to be related to this God, you have to believe in the story, because the story is the only way you can know who he is. It is not a matter of constructing a proof or contemplating some eternal truth. It is a matter of knowing the story of a particular person — knowing a story about someone, rather than gazing at the vision of something. And that is why the Hebrew Bible is fundamentally a matter of faith rather than reason, although reason is not absent.

The Historical and Political Setting

We need to look at the history, because what the faith centers on is the history and story of this relationship. So in looking at biblical history, we have to look at the central character: Israel, which is a nation, a people, in a place. In the land of Israel, nestled in between a number of other small countries — Moab, Edom, Ammon, as they are called, which you can see on a map in the back of almost any Bible — and a little further away there are some very large countries: Assyria, Egypt, and later Babylon. These are empires. They expand, they fight each other, and the territory in between is Israel. The great

wars of the empires are fought on the battleground of Israel. It is a very precarious, dangerous, and worrisome position to occupy if you are this small country.

The nations surrounding Israel also have gods. They tend to have many gods, in contrast to Israel, which has only one. But typically these nations will have a most high god. The god of the Moabites is named Chemosh, just as the god of Israel is named the Lord. And as with Israel, the gods of the nations fight for their nations. Chemosh fights for Moab. We actually have an inscription on a stone where the king of Moab boasts about how Chemosh, his god, helped him defeat the Israelites. And of course the Bible has stories which return the favor and speak of how the Lord God helped Israel defeat Moab.

Israel's Particular Relationship with God

That is the social and historical situation. Each people has its relationship with its gods, and the God of Israel is one God — the only God Israel worships. The fundamental faith of Israel is not simply the abstract monotheistic belief that there is only one God. For a long period, many Israelites seem to have believed that there were, in fact, many gods; it was simply that only one God was Israel's God, and only that God would Israel worship. The other gods, with a small *g* — sons of God, angels, immortals, whatever you wish to call them — are not to be worshipped. So there may be many gods, but only one is the bridegroom of Israel, the husband of Israel, the Lord with whom Israel is in this covenant relationship.

The Patriarchal Covenant: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob

The covenant begins in Genesis, the first book of the Bible, when we hear the story of the three patriarchs — Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Isaac is Abraham's son; Jacob is Isaac's son. These are the ancestors of the nation of Israel, and the covenant begins with them, with Abraham. When the Lord speaks to Abraham, as recorded in Genesis chapter 12, he says: Abraham, leave your country, your people, your father's household, and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you. Israel will come from you. There will be a great nation coming from you in the future. I will make your name great. You will be a blessing. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you.

So Abraham is the beginning of the chosen people. But he is chosen so that his people, Israel, might be a blessing to the whole world. The choosing of Israel is not meant for the destruction of other nations — it is meant for the blessing of other nations.

Israel is also, it should be noted, the name of Jacob, Abraham's grandson. Jacob receives the name Israel after wrestling with a mysterious figure — a man? An angel? God? It is rather murky in the story. At one point the figure is called a man; at another, an angel. But what is clear is this: it is night, Jacob is anxious about the future, he is about to face one of the most dreadful challenges of his life, and along comes this mysterious figure. Jacob wrestles with him all night and — echoing that theme we have seen in the Bible — will not let him go until he receives a blessing. This figure, who is traditionally understood as an angel of the Lord speaking for the Lord, gives Jacob both a wound in the thigh and a blessing, along with a new name. He is renamed Israel, which means *he struggles with God*. Just to confirm that this is a relationship in which there will be a great deal of conflict and quarrel. Jacob struggles with God and receives a blessing, as well as a wound. There is the story of Israel in a nutshell.

Most of you, I am sure, know the outlines of what follows. Jacob has twelve sons, who become the twelve tribes of Israel. They end up in

Egypt because of Joseph — a story I cannot get into here. In Egypt they are fruitful and multiply, the Egyptians become alarmed and make them into slaves, and then there is the story of the Exodus.

The Exodus and the Founding of the Nation

God calls Moses to go to Pharaoh and say: let my people go. He is to bring them out of Egypt to the land of milk and honey. For the Bible, this is the story of the origin of the nation of Israel — this is God creating Israel as a people. The story is told in the book of Exodus, which is really the founding document, the founding story, of who this nation called Israel is. The story of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is something like a prehistory. The first true founding story of who Israel is as a nation is in Exodus.

It is here that you find the crucial covenant between the Lord God and Israel, which is presented as a renewal of the covenant between God and Abraham. Even while the people are still in Egypt, the Lord God makes this promise: *I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God, and then you will know that I am the Lord your God*. This is a formulation of the covenant that recurs over and over again throughout the Bible. You will be my people, I will be your God. It is like a wedding vow: I am taking you as my people; you are going to be my people; I am going to be your God. And you will know that I am the Lord.

The Name of God

We need to pause here and say something about that name — the Lord. When the Lord says, *you will know that I am the Lord*, which he says many, many times in the Bible, frequently, and especially throughout the book of Exodus, it can sound in English as though he

is simply bragging about how much power he has. That is unfortunate, because that is not at all what it means.

The word *Lord* — translated in many English Bibles with four capital letters, LORD — translates a very special word which I will not pronounce, because Jews do not pronounce this word, and out of respect I will follow their practice. It is the sacred name of God. It is spelled out and transliterated into English with four letters: Y-H-W-H. Sometimes vowels are added to give the form Yahweh, and sometimes Christians even use that form in their worship services, which I think is terribly disrespectful to Jews. So I will not pronounce the name.

What do Jews do, then, when they read this story aloud in the synagogue, as they do regularly? When they come to this name, instead of pronouncing it, they say *Adonai*, which is Hebrew for Lord. And that is what gets translated into English as LORD with the four capital letters.

So when the Lord says, *I am the Lord*, he is saying that name which is no longer spoken aloud — I am Adonai — and he is announcing his name. He is not bragging about how powerful he is; he is announcing his name. He is a new god on the scene, at least as far as the Egyptians are concerned. The Egyptians have all these gods they worship, with statues and temples. Here is a god that no one has ever seen before and no one — at least not Pharaoh — has ever heard of before. And this God is announcing his name so that his people will know who he is. That is why he keeps saying: I am the Lord. I am the Lord. You will know that I am the Lord. He is saying: here I am. Here is who I am. I am your God, and this is my name.

And so, for example, when the Israelites get out of Egypt — after the ten plagues and the confrontations between Moses and Pharaoh — and Moses goes up to Mount Sinai and receives the Ten

Commandments, those commandments do not begin with a command. They begin with God announcing his name. He says: *I am the Lord your God* — announcing his name once again — *who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery*. He announces his name and then gives a brief version of the story we have just read in the first twenty chapters of Exodus. God is identifying himself by his name and by his story, the way a person does. Not like Plato's idea of the good, which is an abstract concept, but rather: I am this particular person. This is my name. This is what I have done. This is who I am. *Now, you shall have no other gods besides me*. And then follow the Ten Commandments.

The Structure of the Covenant

So the covenant between God and Israel is shaped by these promises — *you will be my people, I will be your God* — shaped by the name of this particular person called the Lord, or Adonai. And now it is going to be shaped in detail by the law: the Jewish law, the Torah, beginning with the Ten Commandments and then the many other laws that follow. Exodus goes on, after giving the law, to another important element in the shape of the relationship between God and Israel. There are a number of episodes — remember the golden calf; Moses breaks the tablets of the law and goes back up the mountain to receive them again. During these sojourns on the mountain, in addition to receiving the law, Moses is given instructions for building the tabernacle, or tent shrine, as a modern translation might have it. This will be a portable shrine, and inside it will be the Ark of the Covenant at which Israel may meet her God. Moses will come to this tent shrine and present himself before the face of God. Many centuries later, this tent shrine will be housed in the temple at Jerusalem — but, of course, the temple does not yet exist; the people have not even reached the Promised Land.

And that is the final element in the relationship between God and Israel that I want to mention: they are heading to the Promised Land. That is intrinsic to the relationship between God and Israel — it has a place, namely the land of Israel. And it has a holy site, the tabernacle, which will become the temple, which will be located in Jerusalem.

So that is the fundamental structure of the relationship. There is this covenant. There is a name. There is a story. There is the giving of the law, which structures the relationship between God and his people. And there are these holy places — the tabernacle and the land of Israel, the Holy Land. Now, that is the structure. Let us talk about the history.

The Law, the Festivals, and Deuteronomy

The structure does not stay neatly in place the way everyone in the story might wish, and you can see that coming already in the next books of the Bible. The third book, Leviticus, sets up more of the structure: more law, regulations for animal sacrifice — bulls and goats and pigeons and so on — and a calendar of festivals: Rosh Hashanah, Sukkot, the Feast of Tabernacles, Passover, and so on. All of that, up through the book of Leviticus, describes a stable cyclical order — the recurring festivals, the recurrent sacrifices, the law which is good forever. You shall not kill, you shall not commit adultery — that is simply the way things are for Israel: this God has redeemed you, and he wants you not to kill each other, not to commit adultery, not to steal from each other.

But now the story needs to be set in motion. And that happens in the fifth book of the Bible. Skipping over the book of Numbers, let us look at Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy is a fascinating treatment of the covenant, because what happens there is Moses giving a speech to the people of Israel just before they are to cross over into the

Promised Land — a crossing Moses himself will not be permitted to make. He begins by rehearsing the history of God bringing his people out of bondage. Then he rehearses the law. And then he says what is coming next.

He reminds the people what has happened to them: *Has any other god ever tried to take for himself one nation out of another nation — by testings, by miraculous signs and wonders, by war?* All that was the story of the ten plagues and the war of the Lord God against Pharaoh in Egypt. *You were shown these things so that you might know that the Lord is God. Besides him, there is no other.*

Then he rehearses what happened on Mount Sinai and mentions the Ten Commandments again. And then he comes to what is called the Shema, the central confession of Israel: *Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength.* Christians will find this familiar — Jesus calls this the first and greatest commandment, but he was simply being a good Jew when he said so. He was not being original. This was already the heart of the Torah.

And then, at the end of the book of Deuteronomy, Moses makes a list of blessings for Israel when they obey the law and curses for Israel when they disobey. He concludes one section of the speech by saying: *See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction. For I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commands, decrees, and laws. Then you will live and increase, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess.*

You can already see where the problem of Job arises — it sounds as if, if you are good, God will reward you. The relationship is going to prove more complicated than that, but this is part of it. Then comes the second part: *But if your heart turns away and you are not*

obedient, and if you are drawn away to bow down to other gods and worship them, I declare to you this day that you will certainly be destroyed. You will not live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess. And finally: *This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and cursings. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live.*

On the surface, it looks like Job and God at the beginning of the book of Job. Job knows what the law is, knows how to fear God, and he is rewarded for it. But it is going to be more complicated than that. It is going to be more like the rest of the book of Job.

The Pattern of Exile and Return

What ends up happening in the history of Israel is a recurring pattern that I will call exile and return. The most famous example is the Babylonian captivity of 586 BC, when the Empire of Babylon comes down, takes Jerusalem, and carries into exile most of the leaders of the Jewish people. They remain there for two generations. In the period between these early books of the Bible and the narrative of that event, we get the story of prophecy and psalm — the story of prophets who issue warnings very much like the one Moses gives in Deuteronomy. And then, in reply, there is a kind of dialogue between God and Israel: Israel responds with the prayers of the Psalms, saying things like, *How long, O Lord? Are you going to be angry at me forever?* There are Psalms of complaint, as they are called. The prophets — Isaiah, Jeremiah, and others — pick up this theme from Deuteronomy with both promises and warnings, and Israel replies with prayers, supplications, and even complaints: *How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever?*

This story continues until the Babylonian captivity, which is the culmination of the curse, the fulfillment of the threat. Israel is taken captive, taken to Babylon — at least the leaders of Israel are. And in a sense the story could have ended there. For many of Israel's neighbors, it did end there. And here, I think, is one of the things that makes Israel different. Quite simply: Israel is still here. Israel is still with us, unlike Moab, Ammon, and Edom, names so unfamiliar that many of us have to look them up on a Bible map just to remember them. They no longer exist.

Now, Israel resembles its neighbors in many ways. Its neighbors also had holy places and temples, had gods fighting on their behalf, or so they thought. They had cycles of festivals and holy days. They trembled when the great mighty empires — Babylon and Assyria — came down and conquered them. The difference is that those neighbors did not come back. And Israel is still with us.

As a result, this structured covenant — in many ways resembling the relationship other nations had with their gods, complete with holy places, sacrifices, festivals, and so on — got interrupted, and then restored. The structure has a history, and this relationship has a history that Israel looks back upon and sees as constitutive of who Israel is. Israel is the people who were brought out of Egypt, given the law on Mount Sinai, led into the Promised Land, disobeyed the Lord their God, were brought into exile in Babylon, and were then graciously forgiven and brought back. To know who Israel is, you must tell that story: the story of exile and return, of being taken away from the land God gave them and then returned to it. It is a pattern that happens more than once in Israel's history, as we know.

History, Eschatology, and the Future

This means that history plays a unique and important role in Israel's religion. The religious strand of Greek philosophy — Plato's notion of the good as the first principle, which we gaze upon in religious contemplation — has no history. There is no story about it. It is simply something that happens recurrently to people who catch a glimpse of the good. Whereas in order to know about Israel's God, you have to know the story, and you have to know who Israel is.

And in addition to having a story, this is a story that has a future — a story that is not yet finished. The end of the story is a glorious future; at least, that is the hope, and that is what the story is tending toward. This glorious future has been given the name *eschatology*, which comes from a Greek phrase meaning discourse about the end, the end understood as fulfillment. What happens when Israel fully returns to their land? The temple, which was destroyed when the Babylonians came and then again hundreds of years later when the Romans suppressed a Jewish revolt — that temple was destroyed and then rebuilt once. What happens when it is restored again? What happens when Israel's life returns to what God meant it to be according to the law of Moses? That is eschatology: the expectation that there will be some kind of fulfillment of this relationship. The relationship is not what it should be when the temple is destroyed and when Israel is not prospering and God does not rule in the land. Eschatology is the hope for a drastic change in the future — a change that will make all the difference, the happily-ever-after ending of God's relationship with his people, this quarreling marriage.

The Davidic Covenant

Another feature of the shape of the Hebrew Bible that I want to look at is the monarchy. Having leapfrogged from the Exodus to the Babylonian exile to examine the pattern of exile and return, let me jump back to the middle — to the second book of Samuel — where there is another covenant of great importance for Israel and for this history.

That is the covenant between God and David. David is the second king of Israel. The first, Saul, failed. He was a disaster and died by suicide while surrounded by his enemies. David is a success. He captures Jerusalem, which becomes his capital city, and he wants to build a house for the Lord. The Lord has been living in a tent, as it were — that is the tabernacle, where Israel has been meeting the Lord their God. David wants to build a proper temple, a permanent house. But he receives an answer from the prophet Nathan that turns things around in an interesting way.

The Lord declares to you, says the prophet Nathan to David, that the Lord himself will establish a house for you.

And the word *house* here is a kind of pun. The word house can mean your descendants. Israel is, in fact, the house of Abraham. Your house includes first of all your immediate descendants — your children — but in an extended sense it includes your entire lineage. So the house of David is all of his descendants, which includes the kings of Israel and Judah — especially Judah — for hundreds of years afterward.

Nathan continues: when your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom. That successor is Solomon, who becomes the heir of David as king of Israel. He is the one, Nathan says, who will build a house for my name — and

indeed Solomon builds the temple. And I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.

So the promise is that there will always be a descendant of David sitting on the throne of Israel. That is part of the covenant. This is one more covenant promise — alongside the promise of presence in the land, the promise of the temple — that will be interrupted and then become a focus of eschatological hope. The lineage of David becomes associated with Israel's sacred places, with the land of Israel, with Jerusalem, called the city of David, and with the temple built by his son Solomon. Likewise, the wrath of God toward Israel means the loss of these holy things — exile from the Holy Land, conquest of Jerusalem, destruction of the temple. And the mercy of God means the restoration of all these things.

Conclusion: Jerusalem and Athens

In sum, think about Jerusalem and Athens once more. The Hebrew Bible is not about the triumph of a form of thought — call it monotheism or whatever you like. The Jews did end up as thoroughgoing monotheists, although they did not actually start there. They believed there were many gods; they simply worshipped only one. And the reason they worshipped only one is not because of a philosophical principle of monotheism, but because of this exclusive marital relationship between two quarreling lovers — this inability of Israel to let go of her bridegroom, and this bridegroom's inability to let go of Israel, because he has made a promise and he will not let her go.

Now, there are some things the Bible has in common with Greek philosophy. As with Plato, the God of Israel is unseen — you do not see him with your body's eyes. That is a key point of similarity. And the God of Israel is one, the origin of all things. That too is a key

similarity with Plato's notion of the good as the unseen origin of all things. And yet the difference is, of course, that this is a person — someone you relate to, rather than something you contemplate. And that is why it is a matter of faith, a matter of this trusting relationship. Can you trust this person's promises? This God who has made all these promises to Israel — and look where Israel is today. Can you trust this man? Can you trust this lover? That is the issue of faith. Reason fits in there, just as reason fits into any trusting relationship, but it is not what the relationship is built on.

And therefore, this is an understanding of God who has a history. To understand this God, to know who he is, you have to know the story of his love relationship — this covenant with Israel. That will set upon the table the view that now gets combined in an interesting and powerful way with Greek philosophy, to produce the great combination of Jerusalem and Athens that we will take up next.

Lecture 16: The Synoptic Gospels — The Historical Jesus and the Kingdom of God

Professor Philip Carey

The Synoptic Gospels and the Gospel of John

The Synoptic Gospels are the first three books of the New Testament: the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. They are called synoptic because their contents could actually be summarized in a common synopsis with relative ease. The fourth Gospel, the Gospel according to John, follows a quite different plotline. It tells some of the same stories, but it is organized differently and has a different thematic focus. The Gospel of John is about Jesus as the Word who was with the Father in the beginning and came into the world to bring eternal life. The Synoptic Gospels focus more on Jesus the man, Jesus the historical figure, and for that reason the Synoptic Gospels tend to be the major source for scholars interested in research on the historical Jesus.

The Quest for the Historical Jesus

This has become a major topic of public controversy in recent years, owing to a tremendous renaissance in research into the historical Jesus. Part of this has been focused in the work of the so-called Jesus Seminar, a group of mostly American, English, and some German scholars engaged in historical Jesus research who have made a significant public splash with what I am calling revisionary historical Jesus research. This is not the only kind of historical Jesus research, however. There is a considerable variety of approaches to the subject.

You can think of it fairly simply as a spectrum. On one end are the revisionary views — the Jesus Seminar and others of a similar viewpoint. On the other end are the traditionalists, and at the very far end of that spectrum you would find fundamentalists. But there are a great many people in between, a lively population at both ends and in the middle, and there is vigorous disagreement among scholars. No single scholarly position has swept the field of all other viewpoints.

I call them revisionary because what the Jesus Seminar and other revisionary scholars are doing is suggesting that we need to revise our understanding of the historical Jesus. Specifically, they argue that there is a significant gap between the way the New Testament presents Jesus — and especially the way the Synoptic Gospels present him — and the way the historical Jesus actually was. The keynote of what I am calling the revisionary view is that there is some kind of gap or discontinuity between the New Testament portrait of Jesus and the historical reality.

For instance, if you think that Jesus could not possibly have predicted his own death — as he does in the Synoptic Gospels — then that is a revisionary view. The notion is that the historical Jesus would not have thought that way. The prediction of his own death, which is actually a speech attributed to him in the Synoptic Gospels, must have been composed by the Christian community or communities that wrote these Gospels. They knew the whole story, they believed in Jesus, and so they wrote their understanding of Jesus back into the narrative. It is their understanding of his identity, not his own, that we see in the Gospels. That is the keynote of the revisionary view: the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith are two different things, and there is some discontinuity between them.

On the other side of the spectrum, the traditionalist view emphasizes continuity between the Synoptic Gospels and the historical Jesus. The

notion here is that we get a reasonably accurate picture in the New Testament of who Jesus actually was — that what we see in the Synoptic Gospels in particular reflects Jesus' own self-understanding.

I want to add a third possible position, one not well represented in historical Jesus research itself. I will call it the skeptical theological view. It is the view held by many theologians that the only thing we truly have access to is the Christ of faith, and that we cannot know very much about the historical Jesus. Interestingly, many theologians who hold a deep faith in Christ will be skeptical about the entire project of historical Jesus research: all we can know about Christ is what is already in the New Testament. That is what I call the skeptical theological view, and it is not really represented in historical Jesus research precisely because it is skeptical of that entire enterprise.

The History of the Quest

The revisionary approach to historical Jesus research — the so-called quest for the historical Jesus — goes back about two and a half centuries. It goes back to the very beginning of what can be called critical historiography: the project of critically examining historical texts and asking whether they can be taken at face value. You can apply this method to the Bible, but you can also apply it to other historical texts. It is, for example, the same kind of question as asking whether Plato's portrait of Socrates gives you an accurate picture of the historical Socrates. If you think Plato is giving you an accurate picture, you are a traditionalist. If you think Plato is more or less inventing Socrates — that there was a real historical Socrates, but the Socrates of Plato's dialogues is largely Plato's invention — then you are a revisionist. Likewise, if you think the New Testament is in large part inventing the Christ of faith, that is the revisionist view. If you

think the Synoptic Gospels give us an accurate picture of the historical Jesus, that is the traditionalist view.

The revisionary scholars I have in mind are represented especially by the Jesus Seminar and by names like Robert Funk, Burton Mack, and John Dominic Crossan, who is probably the most interesting of the group and who has written a fascinating book on the subject. The traditionalist wing is perhaps best represented by N.T. Wright — sometimes called Tom Wright — who has written some very important books on the historical Jesus and the broader New Testament project.

The Key Research Documents

One useful way to approach historical Jesus research is to look at the primary documents that scholars in this field actually use. The New Testament is, of course, the key resource — especially the Synoptic Gospels — but there are others. If you want to examine the same documents that historical Jesus researchers are working with, there are five that probably make up somewhere between 85 and 90 percent of the material they draw upon.

The first, which N.T. Wright regards as the most important, is the Old Testament pseudepigrapha. This means all the Jewish writings that fall between the Old Testament and the New Testament — or, in Jewish terms, between the Hebrew Bible and the rabbinic writings. There is a large collection of them, gathered in two thick volumes. They were written after the Hebrew Bible but before the emergence of rabbinic Judaism, and they give us an important window into the literary context and thought world of the first century AD, the world in which the historical Jesus lived.

Second is the historical writings of Josephus, a Jewish writer composing for a Roman audience in the first century. He wrote a

history of the Jewish people and a history of the Jewish War — the great rebellion against Rome from 67 to 70 AD, which ended with the destruction of the temple. His writings give us invaluable historical grounding for the period.

Third are the Dead Sea Scrolls, the famous scrolls discovered in a cave above the Dead Sea, written probably by a community that existed from roughly the second century BC to the first century AD. Most scholars think they did not directly influence Jesus or the New Testament writers, but they do give us a picture of the alternative forms of Judaism available in the thought world of the first century. Rabbinic Judaism — the standard form of Judaism as we now know it — had not yet taken definitive shape. In the first century AD, everything was in flux. There were many competing versions of what Judaism might be: the version of the Pharisees, the version of the Qumran community responsible for the Dead Sea Scrolls, the version of the followers of Jesus. Seeing the range of possibilities available in this transitional period is genuinely illuminating.

Fourth is the Gospel of Thomas — literally a lost gospel, dug up in Egypt, found in a cave, and dating in its manuscript form to about the fourth century. It consists entirely of sayings of Jesus with no narrative at all, no story, just sayings. Most of these were probably composed in the third or fourth century, but some may go all the way back to the historical Jesus. Some scholars — especially those associated with the Jesus Seminar — think that a few sayings in the Gospel of Thomas may actually be more authentic and original than the parallel sayings in the Synoptic Gospels.

Fifth and last is Q. The name comes from *Quelle*, German for source. Q is a hypothetical document — but it has been reconstructed by scholars and you can find it in bibliographies. The standard view is that Mark is the earliest of the Gospels, and that Matthew and Luke both drew upon Mark. But Matthew and Luke also share a body of

material with each other that they do not share with Mark, which suggests they had a second common source. That hypothetical source is called Q. Scholars who do not believe in Q suggest alternative explanations — perhaps Matthew read Luke, or Luke read Mark, or they are drawing on a common oral tradition — but it is possible that there was a shared written document. Scholars like those of the Jesus Seminar are particularly interested in reconstructing this hypothetical document and thinking about what kind of Christian community would have used it and what they believed. The underlying idea is that if you can look behind the construction of the New Testament and trace its sources, you can chart the development from the historical Jesus through a series of stages to the finished New Testament documents, and in doing so see how faith in Christ took shape and how that altered the portrait of the original historical Jesus. This is, again, the logic of discontinuity — the revisionist view.

Historical and Literary Context

Another useful approach to historical Jesus research is to attend to certain aspects of the context — both historical and literary — within which the Synoptic Gospels are set.

On the historical side, this is the sort of information you turn to Josephus for. One striking contextual fact is that there were a great many robbers about. Remember that Jesus was crucified alongside robbers, bandits, or thieves — the translation varies. The crucial point is that these were not burglars who broke into houses. These were highway robbers. Think of them as figures like Robin Hood — armed men operating in the countryside. They were, in fact, the only armed men not in the pay of the Roman Empire, which is precisely why the Romans crucified them when they caught them. These were a

potential revolutionary force. And indeed, in Josephus, the revolutionary fervor that fed into the Jewish wars against Rome tended to coalesce around initial nuclei of highway robbers — armed men in the countryside who could serve as the seed of organized resistance. They also tended to have good relationships with the villages around them, just as in the Robin Hood legend. Even if your program is not explicitly to rob from the rich and give to the poor, if you are a highway robber you will want to cultivate the villagers who feed you, protect you, and perhaps hide you from the Romans. That natural alliance between highway robbers and ordinary villagers could easily lead to robbing from the rich and giving to the poor, and might lead to open rebellion against Rome — which might, in turn, get you crucified, as it regularly did.

On the literary side, there is apocalyptic literature. This is one of the major genres represented in the Old Testament pseudepigrapha. It begins with the book of Daniel in the Old Testament and is heavily represented in the literature of the first centuries BC and AD — works like the book of Enoch. The book of Revelation, the last book of the New Testament, is also an example of this genre. Apocalyptic literature consists of heavenly visions, often highly symbolic, in which those visions symbolize earthly and historical events.

For instance, in the book of Daniel there are four beasts rising up from the sea, representing the rise of mighty nations and empires — Persia, Greece, Alexander the Great. The last beast is a ten-horned creature representing Rome. Then Daniel has a vision of the Ancient of Days sitting on the throne, and then there comes one described as the Son of Man who comes on the clouds of heaven — a key phrase — and approaches the Ancient of Days, who is God enthroned. To this Son of Man is given glory, power, and dominion, and all nations bow before him. In context, the Son of Man most likely represents what the text calls the saints of the Most High — probably meaning

Israel — coming to receive dominion over the world from God after the beast empires are defeated. It is a prophecy about history, an extension of Old Testament prophetic literature. But it became enormously important for early Christianity, as we will return to.

Jesus and the Kingdom of God

With that context in mind, let us turn to the historical Jesus himself. One thing all scholars agree upon — revisionary and traditionalist alike — is that the historical Jesus was a preacher of the kingdom of God. That is the standard translation. His preaching is summarized early in the Gospel of Mark, which I will be using as my primary example of the Synoptic Gospels, in words something like these: *The time is fulfilled. The kingdom of God is coming. Repent and believe the good news.* To repent here suggests: the true king is coming; you need to change sides, stop rebelling, and join the true king.

The kingdom of God is sometimes paraphrased in Matthew as the kingdom of heaven, but do not let that mislead you. It is not about going to heaven. There is no picture in the New Testament of good people going up to heaven after they die. The kingdom of God means something like: the time when God rules. The suggestion is eschatological. Israel is still in a certain sense in exile because, even though the people are in their land and the temple has been rebuilt — by Herod, of all people — things are not right. The Romans are ruling. The temple is essentially unclean and unfit for proper worship because it is under the control of Gentiles and was built by this half-Jewish king Herod. Most Jews in the first century seem to have been waiting for the time when the Lord God would rule over Israel rather than the Romans. And so the proclamation of the kingdom of God was, most scholars think — even many traditionalists — a revolutionary act. Jesus is saying: the kingdom of God is coming, the

time when God will rule Israel rather than the Romans. He cannot say that last part out loud, because that is the sort of thing that gets you crucified. So one of the things going on is that Jesus must proclaim this kingdom without proclaiming it in ways that will immediately get him killed — although later on he seems to perhaps quite deliberately say things that will do exactly that.

The great question in historical Jesus research about this preaching is: what exactly did Jesus mean by it? What did he think the kingdom of God was? And above all, what did he think about his own role in it? Was he simply a prophet or messenger? Or was he in some sense the Son of God coming as the successor to David to be the very presence of the kingdom of God on earth? How central did Jesus himself think he was to the kingdom of God as he conceived it? Revisionary scholars tend to think Jesus probably did not regard himself as the central figure. Traditionalist scholars tend to think he did — that for Jesus, the kingdom of God became real precisely because of his own presence.

The Works of Jesus

One way to get at what Jesus meant by proclaiming the kingdom of God is to look at both his deeds and his teaching. Let us start with his deeds — his works of healing and cleansing.

There used to be a major argument about whether Jesus really performed miracles, with traditionalists saying he did so to prove he was the Son of God, and revisionists disputing this. But that is an older debate. The new consensus, shared across the spectrum, is that Jesus was a miracle worker in some meaningful sense. You could call him a faith healer if you like. Even scholars who do not believe in miracles will say this: he went around and healed people. That was a central part of his ministry. The unanimous testimony of the Gospels

— our strongest evidence — is that he did this. Faith healing is a well-attested historical phenomenon, and many people across history have done it.

John Dominic Crossan, one of the most bold and interesting of the Jesus Seminar scholars, has developed a particularly vivid picture of Jesus' activity. Jesus and his disciples would move through the countryside, healing people and casting out demons — exorcising what we might call the craziness in people, which seems to have been a very important part of their ministry. In return, they would be received into the villages and fed. At one point, Jesus commands his disciples to go out without a bag, which meant they could carry no food at all — there were no pockets, and a bag was the only means of carrying bread or fish. He was saying: go around with nothing to eat, heal these people, and the arrangement is that they feed you in return.

In Crossan's portrait, that is the early Jesus movement in essence: Jesus and his itinerant disciples go around healing people in the villages of Galilee, and in return they are fed. But there is a condition — or rather, the condition is that there are no conditions. Everybody comes to the table. Everybody gets to eat, even those you might want to exclude as outcasts, especially the unclean. Lepers, for instance, were not simply sick people; under Jewish law they were ritually unclean. Jesus' idea was: you heal these people, which makes them clean and restores them to full membership in the holy people of Israel, and then you invite everyone to the table — the outcasts, the tax collectors, the sinners, the lepers now made clean. Everyone gets to come and eat. And that, for Crossan, is the kingdom of God, or at least a sign of its coming.

There are other possible interpretations of what Jesus was doing, but surely part of it has to be this: he was restoring Israel, setting things right, healing and restoring, making clean what was unclean,

bringing the body of Israel back to a state of holiness and wholeness so that it might appropriately worship the Lord God.

The Teachings of Jesus

Now consider the teachings of Jesus. His most distinctive form of teaching is, of course, the parables — cryptic stories, perhaps deliberately so. These seem to be parables about the kingdom, and that much is widely agreed. The debate is over what exactly he is saying about the kingdom, and what he thinks about his own role within it. Some scholars think the parables are fundamentally about Jesus himself — a traditionalist reading. Others argue that Jesus did not envision himself as the one who would be killed for the redemption of Israel; that, they say, is a later Christian idea imposed on Jesus by the New Testament writers.

The Shape of the Gospel of Mark

At this point, I want to broaden the picture and look at the overall plotline of the Synoptic Gospels. This will be familiar territory, but I want to point out something about the shape of a story you probably already know. I am following the Gospel of Mark because it gives the most stripped-down version of the plot. Matthew has long sermons; Luke has a great many parables; but Mark has the simplest and starkest version of the overall story of Jesus' work, and you can read it in a single sitting.

When you read Mark, you will notice that the central event at the heart of the text is a complex episode whose core is what is called the transfiguration. It all begins, however, when Jesus turns to his disciples and asks: who do you think I am? They attempt a couple of wrong answers, but then Peter gets it right. He says: you are the

Messiah. Translated into Greek, that word becomes Christ; in English it means the anointed one. In ancient Israel, kings were not crowned — they were anointed with oil. So the anointed one meant the rightful successor to King David, the true king of Israel. It was also possible for a highway robber seeking to overthrow the Romans to claim this title, and evidently some did. So this is not an impossible thing for Jesus to have thought about himself — though whether he actually did is a matter of intense scholarly debate.

Jesus could easily be mistaken for one of these robbers, or a non-violent version of them. Here are these men wandering around the countryside, not robbing anyone, but building a movement that could be perceived as threatening — especially by someone like Pontius Pilate.

So Peter says: you are the Messiah. And Jesus' response in Mark is simply: be quiet. In Matthew and Luke, Jesus congratulates Simon — blessed are you, Simon — but in Mark he simply tells him to say nothing. This may suggest that publicly proclaiming Jesus as the anointed king of Israel would be a seditious act and could get him crucified.

What follows immediately is that Jesus predicts he will in fact be crucified. If you are a revisionary scholar, you will say he could not possibly have meant that — he could not have anticipated his own death in such specific terms. If you are a traditionalist, you might say he could easily have known that the path he was on led to crucifixion. Peter does not like this prediction at all: he protests, not really in so many words, that the Lord cannot be going to his death. And Jesus answers: get behind me, Satan — you are thinking the thoughts of men and not of God.

The crucial point is that it was profoundly paradoxical to suggest that the Messiah — the king of Israel, the true descendant and successor

of David — would end up being killed. That cannot be right. Everyone found this paradoxical. But the Jesus of the New Testament predicted it nonetheless, and said: this is who I am — the Messiah who is going to be crucified.

After this comes the transfiguration itself, the moment on the mountain when heavenly glory shines from Jesus. Revisionary scholars will not accept this as historical, of course. But for Mark it is a revelation of who Jesus really is.

The Passion, the Resurrection, and What Followed

At the end of the Gospel of Mark comes the story of the passion and the crucifixion. What seems to set the final events in motion is Jesus walking into the temple and acting as though he owned the place — an act that seems to be making a statement about the kingdom of God. When Pilate asks him, are you the king of the Jews? — that is simply another way of asking: are you the Messiah? The Messiah means the king of the Jews. That is precisely why the inscription placed over the cross reads as it does. It is a Latin way of saying he is the Messiah. And when the chief priest asks the same question in Hebrew terms — are you the Messiah, the son of the Blessed One? — Jesus answers: *I am, and you will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven*. That is a direct use of apocalyptic language drawn from the book of Daniel. It is clear that the New Testament at least, and perhaps Jesus himself, pictured his identity in terms borrowed from this apocalyptic tradition. That identification of Jesus with the Son of Man from Daniel would be the traditionalist reading.

And then, of course, there is the resurrection at the end of the story. What you make of that depends very much on where you stand in relation to Christian faith. But as a purely historical observation, we can say this: what distinguishes Jesus from all the other competing

messianic claimants of the first century — and there were quite a number — is that around Jesus there grew up a community of people who believed that he was no longer dead. Not that his soul had ascended to heaven, but that his body was gone from the tomb and he himself was no longer dead. The earliest Christians were a community of people who believed that this crucified Messiah had died and had come back. That is the keystone of New Testament faith, which lies at the heart of the Synoptic Gospels. We will take up what the early Christian community made of all this in the next lecture.

Lecture 17: Paul — Justification by Faith

Professor Philip Carey

Paul's Letters and the Question of Jew and Gentile

The Synoptic Gospels are the first books of the New Testament in the order in which you read through it, but they were not the first to be written. The earliest writings in the New Testament are the letters of Paul — the letters of a missionary preaching Christ to communities of Jews and Gentiles in the eastern Mediterranean.

It is important to be precise about that, because one of the ways Paul gets persistently misread is as though he were talking about the difference between Christians and Jews. That is a distinction which only emerged later, in part as a consequence of Paul's own writings. The distinction Paul himself is concerned with, in almost all of his writings, is the distinction between Jew and Gentile — between those who are ethnically part of the people of Israel and those who are not. Paul is dealing with communities of believers in Christ that consist of both Jews and Gentiles together: both members of the people of Israel and those who stand outside the people of Israel joining in one community to believe in this man Jesus. That one community is a fundamentally new event, and it becomes the basis of Christianity as a distinct religion. But for Paul, the worry, the back-and-forth, the conflict he has to deal with is the conflict between Jews and Gentiles within the Christian community. This is an intra-Christian conflict, not a conflict between Christianity and Judaism.

In the early stages of the Christian movement — and we can see this in the Gospels — nearly all believers in Jesus were Jews. All of the disciples were Jews. Jesus himself was a Jew, his followers were Jews, his mother was a Jew, and Paul himself was a Jew. Christianity starts

out as a Jewish movement, as one of several competing forms of Judaism in the first century. Some of those competing forms of Judaism died out, like the community responsible for the Dead Sea Scrolls. Others eventually developed into Rabbinic Judaism. Christianity ended up becoming no longer fundamentally Jewish in character, but it was fundamentally Jewish to begin with, and that is Paul's context.

Paul's concern is therefore at its root a social concern. It is about this community of believers in Christ and the fact that they are drawn from both Jews and Gentiles, and he does not want them to be divided. The central question for him is: on what terms do Gentiles enter the Christian community? Since Christianity is in its origins a Jewish idea — founded by a Jew, preached by Jewish disciples, including Paul, who came into the movement relatively late — the question of how non-Jews can participate is urgent. And the crucial contribution Paul makes to Christianity is his answer: Gentiles enter the community by faith, not by becoming Jews. Non-Jews can join the Christian community not by converting to Judaism, but simply by faith in Christ. This becomes a fundamental tenet of Christianity and ends up having larger ramifications than one might at first expect.

Baptism and the Shape of the Christian Community

Let us think about this community and the issue of how you enter it — how you pass from outside to inside. So far as we can tell, all of the early Christian communities marked that passage with a crucial initiation rite. We call it baptism. Baptism marked the social boundary of the community. Someone who was baptized was passing from outside the Christian community to inside.

In doing so, baptism marked the boundary of a community set up in an entirely different way from ancient Israel. In ancient Israel, you

joined by being born, and if you were male, you were circumcised as a baby, and that was the sign of your being part of the covenant community. The Christian community was not formed by birth; it was marked by this voluntary initiation rite.

Baptism is therefore a very significant thing, because it shapes and defines the community. And it seems to have been universally practiced in the early Christian communities. What does it mean? First of all, it is a washing. It seems to derive historically from the Jewish practice of ritual washing when one has become unclean. If you somehow became unclean — by touching a corpse, for instance — you had to wash and wait a certain time before you were counted as clean again. There was a whole series of such ritual washings that marked a passage from an unclean state to a clean one. And it seems that by the first century it was customary, when Gentiles converted to Judaism, to require them to undergo a complete washing — a baptism. The word baptism, incidentally, is simply Greek for dipping or dunking; to be baptized is to be dunked in water. Gentile converts had to be washed in this way as a sign — and perhaps as a means — of passing from an unclean people into the holy people of Israel.

Something startling was therefore happening when John the Baptist appeared preaching a baptism of repentance. His audience was Israelites — members of the covenant community who already belonged to the holy people. The implication was that the entire nation of Israel had become so unclean that everyone needed to repent and be washed off in this ritual way to be made acceptable to God. Then came the Christian community, which baptized everyone: Jews and Gentiles alike. The idea was that everyone needed to be made clean in order to participate in the Christian community. Everyone, Jew and Gentile, had been made unclean by sin, and everyone would be made clean through faith in Christ and baptism.

Baptism thus became connected with believing in Christ, because what constituted the Christian community was a group of people believing in Christ, and baptism marked the entrance into that state of belief. But baptism was not only a washing. It also marked this passage from outside the community to inside, and therefore the early Christians seem to have understood it as a passage from death to life. For what happens to you when you believe in Christ within the Christian community is that you share in his life. This seems to have been one of the crucial convictions of the early Christian movement: it was constituted by the belief that Jesus was not dead, that he was crucified but is now alive. This is Easter faith, faith in the resurrection of Christ.

And that means something important about the nature of Jesus' life. He has not merely been resuscitated. He has eternal life. He will never die again. His life is unending and everlasting. And by believing in Christ, you come to share in that life. You receive a share in unending life. To pass into the Christian community is therefore to pass from a mortal life to an everlasting one. Baptism marks a transition from death to life — what some texts of the New Testament call rebirth, or being born again.

So we have this crucial ritual which embodies initiation, passage from outside to inside, washing and passage from uncleanness to cleanness, and passage from death to life. That is what defines the shape of the Christian community.

Consider the nature of that community. It is very different from Jesus' itinerant followers in the Gospels, who were a group of Jews traveling among Jewish villages. The Christian community Paul is addressing is drawn from both Jewish and Gentile communities throughout the eastern half of the Roman Empire, where everyone — including most Jews — spoke Greek. Paul is preaching in this world, gathering converts from both Jews and Greeks, as he will say. They

are baptized and brought together in one community. These communities are characterized by two beliefs and a practice: the belief that Jesus is not dead, the belief that through faith they share in his eternal life, and the practice of baptism.

They are also, crucially, mixed communities consisting of both Jews and Gentiles. And that mixture — the tension of that mixed community — is felt very strongly. The question is: are Gentiles really permitted to be part of what is at its core a Jewish community? Christianity began as a Jewish movement. How can non-Jews partake of it without converting to Judaism? Don't they have to convert to Judaism, get washed off, and become Jews in order to be Christians? You can see how this is not a dispute between Jews and Christians but an intra-Christian dispute, a dispute within the Christian community about the status of Gentiles.

Justification by Faith

Paul takes this question head-on and gives a firm answer: do Gentiles have to become Jews in order to be Christians? No. Absolutely not. Gentiles do not have to convert to Judaism in order to believe in Christ. What is truly necessary is simply to believe in Christ. That is what is called justification by faith — justification by faith in Christ.

Let me unpack that central concept, because it is the core of Paul's thinking. The full phrase is: justification by faith in Christ apart from the works of the law. Let us work backward through it, starting from the end.

The law does not mean the general moral law or good works in some broad sense. It means specifically the Jewish law — very specifically the law of Moses, and above all the requirement of circumcision. If you were going to join the covenant with Israel, you had to be circumcised if you were male. The normal Israelite was circumcised

eight days after birth, but if a Gentile man wanted to join Israel, he had to be circumcised as an adult. Many of the earliest Christians could not conceive of Gentiles believing in Christ without first joining the covenant of Israel through circumcision. Paul says no. These Gentiles are justified by faith in Christ apart from the works of the law — apart from circumcision. You do not have to circumcise them in order to allow them to be Christians. Faith in Christ is sufficient.

When the phrase justification by faith occurs in Paul, it means specifically believing in Christ. It does not mean faith in some general sense — as if simply believing everything will work out will make it so. It means: if you believe in Jesus, you are permitted to join the Christian community and share in his eternal life without being Jewish. If you are already Jewish, that is fine too. But the problem is with the Gentile. How does the Gentile join? Simply by believing in Christ and getting baptized.

Now for the key term: justification. It comes from the word justice, and therefore from the word righteousness, because righteousness is simply another translation of exactly the same Greek word that gets translated as justice — the same word Plato discusses in the Republic. When Paul talks about justification, he is talking about being made righteous. He speaks of the righteousness of God, or the justice of God. Scholars debate intensely what Paul means by this phrase, but we can capture most of the scholarly views, I think, by saying that to be justified for Paul means to be made righteous in God's sight — by believing in Christ and being baptized, rather than by adhering to the law of Moses and being circumcised. And concretely, what it means to be righteous in this sense is to join the Christian community and share in the eternal life of Christ.

The Radical Separation of Covenant from Law

Why would Jewish Christians have wanted Gentiles to be circumcised? Imagine you are a Jewish follower of Christ in the early period of Christianity. The issue for you is: don't Gentiles have to be brought into the covenant with Israel in order to share in life in Christ? Life in Christ means participation in the kingdom of God, life before the God of Israel. No one in early Christianity was abandoning the God of Israel. Paul and all the other early Christian preachers were emphatic that the God they were speaking of was the God of Israel. Gentiles, through faith in Christ, were therefore coming into a new relationship with the God of Israel. But how could they do that without being part of the covenant with Israel? And how could they be part of that covenant unless the men were circumcised? Circumcision was the sign of the covenant given to Abraham at the very founding of the history of Israel.

Paul's answer to this is genuinely radical. He teaches that Gentiles are brought into that covenant relationship with the God of Israel, without being subject to the Jewish law, simply by believing in Christ. Faith in Christ makes them part of the covenant. In one of his key metaphors in the letter to the Romans, he describes it as grafting a wild olive branch into a cultivated olive tree. Some of the original branches of the olive tree have been pruned off — those are the Jews who do not believe in Jesus. But to replace them, some of the Gentiles are being grafted in. The Gentiles are being brought into the covenant with Israel through faith in Christ, rather than by following the commandments of the law of Moses.

This separation of the covenant from the law is a deeply radical move. For most Jews — and for later Rabbinic Judaism looking back at it — this is arguably un-Jewish. One could make the case that this is the move that ultimately pushed Christianity away from being a form of Judaism. If faith in Christ is sufficient to bring you into the

covenant with Israel, then a great deal of the law of Moses can be left behind, especially circumcision. When a Gentile is receiving eternal life without any involvement in the law of Moses and circumcision, this no longer looks Jewish. And as the years went on, within a century or two, the Christian community became largely Gentile. By roughly 200 to 250 AD, except in certain communities in Palestine and Jerusalem, most Christian congregations were entirely Gentile. The Jewish character of Christianity disappeared.

And then when people — including ourselves — go back and read the letters of Paul, the dispute he is engaged in starts to look like a dispute between Christians and Jews, rather than what it actually was: a dispute within the Christian community about the status of Gentiles.

Paul's Further Radicalism and the Story of Abraham

Paul goes one step further still. It was already radical to say that Gentiles enter the covenant with Israel simply by believing in Christ. But Paul then says that even Jews become part of the covenant with their own God through faith in Christ. Everyone who is to be justified is justified solely by faith in Christ, not by circumcision. Jews should get circumcised — Paul does not tell them to abandon circumcision — but circumcision does not justify them. It does not bring them into life with Christ. Only faith in Christ does that, and it is required of both Jews and Gentiles alike. Just as in the baptism of John the Baptist, both Jews and Gentiles needed that cleansing.

At this point you see that we are dealing with a fundamentally new basis for religious community. Both Jews and Gentiles must undergo a fundamental change. They must pass from death to life, taking on a new identity as believers in Christ.

Paul argues for this position, in the letter to the Romans and in the letter to the Galatians, by referring to the story of Abraham. Abraham, remember, is the first person to whom God gives the covenant that becomes the covenant with Israel. Shortly after establishing this covenant with Abraham, God gives him circumcision as its sign. Now, this is long before Moses — it is before the law of Moses. Paul looks at the story very carefully and notices something: Abraham was justified before he was circumcised. There is a moment in the story where Abraham believes the covenant promises of God, and the text says that God counted this as righteousness for Abraham — when he believed the promises. The key promise was that Abraham would be the father of many nations, and this was at a time when he had no children through his wife Sarah, who was elderly and had long seemed too old to have children. It was difficult to believe that Abraham could become the father of many nations through such a woman. But he believed God, believed the promises, and that was counted as righteousness. Later, Sarah did conceive and bore Isaac.

Paul seizes on that passage and says: you see — justification, righteousness, does come by faith and not by works of the law. Abraham was righteous before he was ever circumcised. He was righteous because he believed the promises of God. In a certain sense, Paul suggests, Abraham also believed in the resurrection of the dead, since at the time when he was commanded to sacrifice Isaac and was willing to give him up, he nonetheless expected Isaac back — he expected that Isaac would not stay dead. The expectation was that Abraham believed God could give life to the dead, as God did with Christ. The faith that justifies us is faith in a God who gives life to what is dead — a God who can give eternal life through the resurrection of Christ. Paul sees Abraham as already anticipating that faith, and therefore as a figure who prefigures justification by faith.

A New Kind of Community

As a result of this radical teaching, a new way of constituting the religious community has emerged. It is a new covenantal community that is not identical with Israel. It is neither Jewish nor Gentile. It is the Christian community. This is where the eventual distinction between Christians and Jews comes from — especially as, over time, there were fewer and fewer Jewish Christians, the vast majority of Jews were those who did not believe in Christ, and the vast majority of Christians were Gentiles. Paul had not yet fully anticipated this outcome in his writings, but he was helping to bring it about by articulating the theology of this new community.

Grace, Election, and Predestination

I want now to take up what Paul has to say that will prove most influential for the later thinkers we will encounter in these lectures, because he is the theologian of the new Christian community, the theologian of what it means to be a Christian and a believer in Christ. There is one particular piece of language Paul uses that becomes enormously influential for later writers like Augustine, Luther, and Calvin.

At one point, Paul distinguishes between living under the law and living under grace. Living under the law is the Jewish way of life — life governed by the law of Moses. Living under grace is the Christian way of life. This is one of the few distinctions in Paul that can legitimately be interpreted as a distinction between Christians and Jews, and it is the distinction that becomes most important for later Pauline thinkers like Augustine, Luther, and Calvin.

What does Paul mean by grace? We know what he means by law. Grace means God's mercy and favor. Think of those two words: mercy and favor. It is like a king graciously choosing to pardon a rebel — an undeserving rebel, one the king could just as well hang — but instead deciding to be merciful to an undeserving sinner. Grace is a kind of mercy. It is also a kind of favor: you are doing something for someone who does not deserve it and to whom you are not obligated. The king does not have to pardon the rebel. But he is a good and merciful king, and so he pardons.

Grace as divine mercy becomes a key term in Western Christianity to designate the relationship of the soul to God — how the believer comes to participate in eternal life in Christ. That participation in eternal life in Christ is central to the whole New Testament. Grace becomes the key term in Western Christianity for how that participation takes place. It becomes absolutely central in Augustine, and through Augustine becomes central in Luther and Calvin.

Now, grace also has another feature: it is a favor, an undeserved favor, which God gives to some and not to others. And that is the frightening part. Paul speaks of what the older translation calls the election of grace — election being an old word for choice. God chooses whom he is going to show favor to. This notion of election goes back to the biblical idea of a chosen people: Abraham is chosen from among the nations, Israel is chosen as the people through whom all nations will be blessed. But in Paul there arises a troubling thought: some are chosen to receive grace and some are not. Paul quotes the Old Testament at this point: "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated," says God. Jacob and Esau are twins, both sons of Isaac. Jacob is the chosen one; Esau is the rejected one.

I think that in the overall context of Paul's argument — chapters nine through eleven of the letter to the Romans — he is not primarily trying to say that God has chosen in advance to condemn certain

people. He is making a complex argument about how God chooses to show favor to the Gentiles in order to make the Jews jealous, so that he can ultimately save everyone, Jew and Gentile alike. That is one reading of the passage. But the more traditional reading understands Paul to be saying that God gives mercy to some people — like Jacob — and not to others — like Esau — and that God is not obligated to give grace to anyone. The king does not have to pardon any rebel. He can pardon some and justly decline to pardon others. This is not equitable in the sense of treating everyone the same, but it is not unjust, because the king owes pardon to no one. That, at least, is how Augustine will argue.

And that raises, you can see, the problem of predestination. If God elects or chooses from all eternity whom he is going to give grace to — and that, at any rate, is what Augustine will say — then some people from all eternity are chosen to be saved, and others are not chosen, and therefore are left to be damned. That is one way of reading this key notion of grace in Paul. It has its frightening dimensions, but also its beautiful ones: there is something very beautiful about the notions of mercy, grace, and favor. But when grace becomes exclusive — when it is something given to some but not to others — it becomes frightening as well.

The Pauline Legacy

This is one of the key issues running through what I will call the Pauline strand of Western Christian tradition: the strand that runs through Augustine, forms an important part of the thought of Thomas Aquinas, and becomes absolutely central in the Protestant Reformation with Luther and Calvin. We will be returning to this legacy frequently — the doctrine of grace and how it connects to justification by faith apart from the works of the law. That is enough

of Paul for now, but we will encounter him again when we turn to Augustine, Luther, and Calvin.

Lecture 18: Plotinus and Neoplatonism

Professor Philip Carey

The Last Great Mind of Pagan Antiquity

We are jumping now from the Bible to the last great figure of pagan antiquity — the last great mind of the pagan world, the last great mind not to be influenced in any deep way by Judaism or Christianity. His name is Plotinus. He was born somewhere in Egypt in the early part of the third century AD and died in 270 AD. He spoke Greek, grew up in Egypt in the Greek-speaking eastern part of the Roman Empire, and ended up doing most of his philosophical work in Rome. He was working, therefore, after the time of the New Testament, yet he was not substantially influenced by Christian or Jewish thought.

You can think of Plotinus as the great articulator of Platonic spirituality. That spirituality became the backbone of many later forms of spirituality, especially within Christianity. He is one of the most interesting figures of the ancient world in precisely this respect, because his major legacy was transmitted through the Christian tradition. He founded what has been called the Neoplatonist tradition. He locates himself within the Platonic tradition, but he is doing something new — or is he? What he is doing is systematizing the whole legacy of ancient philosophy, especially the Platonic tradition, while borrowing considerably from Aristotle and from the Stoics. Overall, it is a Platonic form of philosophy that presents a kind of classic articulation of Platonic spirituality. Almost all of the individual pieces of Plotinus' philosophy come from the tradition of the pagan philosophical past, but he assembles them into a package that had never been so coherent and systematic before. His main

influence is on Christian spirituality — on figures like Augustine and on the mystics of the Middle Ages.

Intellectual Vision: The Fundamental Activity of Being

To enter into Plotinus, let us begin with something we have already seen in Plato: the metaphor of seeing with the mind's eye, or intellectual vision. This is the fundamental activity of all being for Plotinus. In fact, for Plotinus, all being really is intellectual vision or contemplation. That is the secret of being. Being is seeing. Being is knowing. Being and knowing are intrinsically linked, and the higher you are on the scale of being, the more you know.

This central activity — intellectual vision, seeing with the mind's eye — can be thought of as thinking, though that translation is somewhat misleading, because it is less like thinking than it is like seeing. It is something that happens in a single moment. It is not like talking things through, arguing, figuring something out, or devising a proof. It is not discursive, as the technical term goes, but intuitive. The word intuition comes from the Latin intuitus, meaning to behold, to see.

One way to grasp this is to put yourself back in that mathematics class we have discussed several times in connection with Plato. You are working through a proof at the board, trying to follow it, but you do not quite have it yet. You are reasoning your way through it step by step. That is called discursive reasoning. But then comes the moment when it all suddenly clicks, and you say: aha, now I see it. The light goes on. Plato compared it to a fire suddenly kindling — all at once there is flame, all at once there is light. That is intellectual vision. It is surrounded by the process of figuring things out, but it does not consist in figuring things out. It consists in seeing it, getting it. For a Platonist, that moment when you say "aha, now I see it" is

the moment when time touches eternity — the moment when a finite human mind, caught up in this world, grasps something about the timeless world of Platonic forms.

Now imagine a mind that is always like that. A mind that grasps these timeless truths and never has to figure anything out — a mind that simply sees. Its whole being consists in gazing at the whole world of Platonic forms and grasping, for instance, all mathematical truths. Its whole eternal being is one endless "aha, I see it all." That is what Plotinus calls the divine mind, or the divine intellect. Christian thinkers like Augustine would call it the mind of God. This is a mind whose whole eternal being is simply this eternal gazing at eternal forms — no process of working things out, no effort of following a train of thought, just vision, just seeing.

Plotinus calls this the intellect, which is probably a better translation than "mind" because the activity involved is intellectual in character. The word in Greek is nous — spelled N-O-U-S. It has been translated as intellect, mind, intelligence, and understanding. Understanding is a good translation, in the sense of understanding mathematics rather than merely calculating it. It has even been translated as spirit, because it has this spiritual quality — it is non-material. The mind that sees the forms has been drawn away from bodily things. It is not contemplating a chalk triangle. It is free from desire, at least from bodily desire. It is free from bodily pain. It is just this eternal moment of eternal joy — that aha moment which is a moment of intellectual excitement and delight. The divine mind is always eternally enjoying this blessed moment of contemplation. Imagine that aha as an eternal moment, and you have the divine mind, the intellect, the understanding.

The activity of this divine mind has been described by various terms: understanding, intellection, intelligizing. It is very commonly called thinking, though again, do not think of figuring things out — think of

seeing. It can also be called contemplation, from a Latin phrase meaning to see, or intuition, from another Latin phrase meaning to behold.

The Intelligible World: Objects of Intellectual Vision

What is it that the intellect sees? It always sees Platonic forms — always some eternal, unchanging truth about reality. It sees eternal beauty, eternal virtue, eternal justice, and all the eternal mathematical truths as well. The overarching label for these objects of intellectual vision is intelligible things. Just as sensible things are things you perceive with the senses, intelligible things are things perceived by the intellect.

When this notion passes into the Christian tradition through Augustine, Plotinus' concept of the divine intellect will be identified with the mind of God. For Augustine, it will mean that God's mind is stocked with forms that serve as blueprints for the world — blueprints by which God creates. That is actually a good metaphor: God is like an artist who creates the world using the forms in his mind — forms of triangles, forms of horses, forms of virtues.

Many Intellects and the Unity of Intellectual Vision

In addition to the one intellect, the divine mind, there are many intellects — small i — our intellects. The highest part of our minds is capable of intellectual activity. We too can see these eternal divine forms, and when we do, we are united with the divine intellect. Here comes a really key notion: when we see a form, according to Plotinus, we become identical with it. Intellectual vision is ultimately a form of identity. The intellect and the form it sees become one and the same thing. So when we perceive a Platonic form — when we say

"aha, I see it" — our minds are being united with it, and thus our minds are becoming one with the divine mind, the divine intellect. We are participating in that eternal aha, that eternal joy which is the perfect possession of all intelligible truths, and we are lifted up into that when we ourselves perceive an eternal truth.

That is a divine moment. That is participation in divine intelligence. And that is why it is so wonderful when you have that aha experience. It is your divine moment — your disembodied, fleshless, spiritual moment. This is a form of otherworldly piety, but there is a real attraction to it. It is a form of tranquil, perfect, eternal joy.

In this notion of intellectual vision, three strands of the Greek philosophical tradition come together. First, there is the idea we encountered in Plato's Phaedo of a fundamental kinship between the soul and the forms. The soul's home is with the forms, not down here among bodies. So that aha moment is a moment of going back home — this is where we belong, and this is the soul's highest and most fundamental function. Second, there is the metaphor of seeing with the mind's eye rather than the eye of the body — a familiar metaphor by now. Third, there is the notion that we become identical with the forms we contemplate. Interestingly, this last and very important notion in Plotinus is actually an Aristotelian one. Plotinus takes it out of context and does not do quite the same thing with it that Aristotle does, but it is Aristotelian in origin, and it becomes absolutely central to the architecture of Plotinus' universe, which is built around variations on the theme of identity and unity.

The One: First Principle and Source of All Being

There is a unity that goes even deeper than intellectual vision, and this becomes crucial for the architecture of Plotinus' universe. For Plato, the many must have its source in the one — the many acts of a

particular virtue like courage all have in common that they participate in the one form of courage; all the virtues share in the one form of virtue; and everything good somehow shares in the one form of the Good. The multitude of changing things in our world is governed and ordered by a one.

For Plotinus, the same logic applies to the forms themselves. There are many forms, so they too must have a one that governs them all. That one Plotinus calls the One — with a capital O, just as the divine mind is the Intellect with a capital I. This One is what Plotinus calls, following Plato, a first principle — meaning a source.

Perhaps the simplest and best metaphor for the One is a geometrical point with a circle around it. A point has no structure. It is utterly one. You cannot break it into parts. But from that point there radiates all the rest of the geometrical forms, and in particular a circle. A circle is defined by its relationship to the center. Think of the circle as the world of forms, containing all this multiplicity. You can break a circle into parts, but the point at the center — which defines the circle — you cannot break into parts. That unbreakable, simple unity is the source of the manifold multiplicity of the world of forms.

If you think that geometrical metaphor through, you will begin to see why, for Plotinus, oneness and simplicity — this impossibility of being broken apart into parts — is what makes something great. The point is not great in extent, but if you are great in extent, that means you can fall apart. To be large in extent is to be further from unity. True unity has no extent, no stretched-out-ness. It cannot break out into parts.

The One is also, in a metaphysical sense, above the forms. There are many forms; the One is above the many because it governs and forms them. Here Plotinus can use the metaphor Plato gave us in the Allegory of the Cave: the One is like a sun shining on the world of

forms. When the soul climbs out of the cave into the light, there are many things to see, but the highest thing to see is the sun itself, which gives visibility to everything else seen with the mind's eye. So the One is the source of intellectual light — what makes all the other forms intelligible. It is therefore the source of both the being and the intelligibility of the forms, just as light is the source of visibility. And in a sense, the light of the sun is the source of the being of things like trees and grass — you would not have them without the sun. This means, of course, that for Plotinus the One is the same thing as what Plato called the Good. Remember that in the Allegory of the Cave, the sun shining at the summit is labeled the Good by Plato. Plotinus therefore holds that the One and the Good are two labels for the same thing — the first principle, the source of all things, and especially the source of intelligible forms.

Three Key Features of the One

We can identify three key features of the One. First, the One is simple — a technical term meaning not complex, not consisting of parts. It is simple the way a geometrical point is simple: you cannot possibly break it into parts. That is a feature of its nobility and its power. It cannot be broken apart; it cannot become other than itself.

Second, the One is above being. This is sometimes expressed as super-essential, where the word essential comes from the Latin word for being. The One is above being in the sense of being above all those essences or true beings. Plato had identified the forms as true being, but the One is above true being. In a sense, then, the One is not the supreme being — the One is above any supreme being. It is the Good above being. To say that the One exists, or has being, is in a sense to degrade it. It transcends mere existence. This does not mean the One does not exist, but mere existence is not adequate

language for it. It is beyond that — and this will lead to mystical language about the nothing above being, or the darkness above light.

Third — and connected to the second — the One is above knowing or understanding or intellect. Since being and knowing are correlated with one another in Plotinus, to be above being is also to be above knowing. The One is above intellectual vision, above understanding, and therefore it is incomprehensible. That is almost a technical term in Plotinian philosophy: the One is above all understanding, and no intellectual vision will ever grasp it. That does not mean we can never reach the One. It means that when we do reach the One, we get there not by seeing it, but by being unified with it. In intellectual vision, there remains a certain duality between knower and known, even though Plotinus says the intellect becomes one with what it sees. Think of how it works for us: we see an eternal triangle, we grasp and understand it, and for a moment our minds become one with it — but then we fall back to our ordinary reality and only remember what that real understanding was like. The identity between mind and form is partial. What is required to reach the One is absolute unification. We do not grasp it — to grasp suggests grabbing with hands. Rather, somehow we become one with it.

Emanation and Return: The Movement of the Universe

The deeper secret here for Plotinus is that we do not so much become one with the One as re-become one with it, because the One is the source of all being. We flowed forth from the One, like everything else, and we return to it. The technical term for this flowing forth is emanation — and there is this fundamental

movement in Plotinus' universe and in his spirituality: emanation, flowing forth, and then returning back. When the soul reunites with the One, it is like a homecoming. It is not an ascent to a place never visited before, but a return to one's original source.

We are, in some deep sense, always united to the One. We just do not realize it. We could not but be united to the One. When we return to it, it is not like a new discovery, but a return to what we have always been. It is a little like Dorothy in The Wizard of Oz discovering that she never really left home. While she was dreaming through her journey, there was trouble and pain, battles to fight, a great deal of work to do — but all of it was to return to the recognition that she had been home all along. During all of it, she had never truly left. Something similar holds for Plotinus: during all the lusts and losses of this world, you have always been one with the One — you simply had not yet realized it. Plotinus calls this the higher part of the soul, the part that has never truly descended from its unity with the One.

The Architecture of the Universe: Four Levels

We can now lay out the full architecture of Plotinus' universe. There is a hierarchical structure with four levels.

At the bottom are bodies — things that can be broken apart, smashed, and cease to exist. Bodies are the only things in the universe that can cease to be, and therefore they are the least real things in the universe.

Above bodies is the soul. The soul can be fragmented and weakened insofar as it is attached to the body, but when it turns toward the intellect it is unified, gaining in power, tranquility, joy, and knowledge. Just as there is one Intellect and many intellects, there is one Soul and many souls. Plotinus would call our individual souls

divided souls, because the one Soul is the source of the many, and manyness is a later and derived phenomenon, while oneness is the original one. We feel separated from one another because we pay so much attention to the outside world, but in truth all souls are fundamentally one.

The soul is located ontologically between the intellect and the body. It differs from the intellect in that it can be embodied, involved in the visible and sensible world, and can therefore become ignorant. The intellect can never be ignorant — our intellects, although they may seem ignorant, never truly are. In our dreams we are ignorant, and the soul spends a great deal of its time dreaming. But the intellect is always, by its very nature, knowing; it cannot be otherwise. The soul, by contrast, can be ignorant. It can suffer from the mortality of the body it is involved with. It can become impure, captured by lust and desire. Intellect cannot be like that. Intellect is pure joy — pure, clean, tranquil joy — whereas the soul can get entangled in desire for money, sex, power, and all the other attachments of this world. The soul is therefore vulnerable to suffering, torn apart in a sense by attachment to physical things, which are themselves the kind of things that can be torn apart. As souls turn away from bodies and back toward the intellect, they ascend, returning toward their original unity, purity, and happiness.

Above the soul is the level of the Intellect itself — that realm of pure knowledge, the eternal, uninterrupted contemplation in which we participate when we see eternal forms.

And above the Intellect is the level of the One — that perfect unity which is so unified that it cannot even be thought of in parts.

The Image of the Universe

Plotinus himself offers a beautiful image that pulls all of this together. Think of the One as a geometrical point at the center of the universe — not in literal space, since space belongs to bodies, but in intellectual space. This geometrical point is the source of all being and all light. It is like a sun compacted into a singularity, a point. Then there is the world of the Intellect — the realm of intelligible form, all those forms of virtue, all the mathematical truths, illuminated by the light of that central point from which all things flow.

Then imagine the Soul as a kind of hollow crystal ball revolving around the Intellect as its center. This is actually not far from how people in the ancient world conceived the solar system — as crystalline spheres revolving around a center. Speaking metaphorically: the soul revolves around the Intellect. On the outer surface of this sphere are a whole multitude of faces, and those faces are our souls — our individual souls, though Plotinus would say divided souls. We are divided from one another because each of us looks outward from our own soul at the external world, and we see it from a different angle. And Plotinus will be among the first to give a specific philosophical meaning to the phrase the external world — it is a world of darkness, of death, of mortality. We are all looking out at it from different perspectives, and therefore we think we are different, that we are many divided souls with no connection between us. But that is an illusion.

If we could take these faces on the outside of the sphere and turn them inward — and turning within is a key phrase Plotinus uses repeatedly — if we could look into the inside rather than the outside, we would see that the inner world of all souls is one world. We have an inner self, for Plotinus, and that inner self is the divine mind. When we turn within, we turn to the world of intelligible forms, to

the world of eternity, to the world of eternal joy. That is our inside. We have a common inside. It is not the case that you have a private inner world and I have a private inner world and they never meet. Our inner world is one world: the intelligible world, the world of the divine mind.

The Legacy of Plotinian Spirituality

There is great spiritual power in this philosophy. I think of it as a philosophy of pure spirituality — one which takes account of our attachment to bodies, but without declaring that bodies are evil or wicked. It is simply that bodies are not our true identity. If you are drawn to the notion of a deep inner unity that is hidden beneath the surface of appearances, you will find something very attractive in Plotinus.

It is, I would suggest, a spirituality that is in many ways purer — more thoroughly spiritual — than the great religious traditions of the West. In Judaism, there is an attachment to the fleshly people of Israel, to a historical identity rooted in the figure of the patriarch Israel and the covenant people. In Christianity, there is an attachment to the person of Jesus — a fleshly, historical person who rose bodily from the dead, and this attachment to the body of Christ is essential to the tradition. No such attachment to anything bodily, historical, or visible is essential to Plotinus. What matters is that inner unity with the divine intellect. In many ways, the deepest affinities in Plotinus' thought are with certain strands of Eastern religion, especially Hinduism, where there is a deep inner unity between the individual soul and the impersonal God. The Sanskrit formula that summarizes it is Atman is Brahman — the deep truth about us is that we are, in our depths, divine. Most of the time we spend dreaming, thinking we are part of the material world, but that is not our true identity.

To sum up: this pure spirituality is very attractive for those who sense that the secret to the universe is some deep inner unity — a unity that is not alien to us but is found in the very depths of our being, such that if we could only reconnect with those depths, we would find the truth that lies behind everything. That is the legacy which Plotinus bequeaths to Western spirituality, and it is a legacy of immense and lasting importance.

Lecture 19: Augustine, Grace and Free Will

Professor Philip Carey

The Most Influential Mind of Western Christianity

We come now to a great mind who was perhaps the most influential thinker in the Western Christian tradition. He stands at the beginning of a distinctively Western Christianity, as opposed to the Eastern Christian tradition that leads to Greek Orthodoxy and Russian Orthodoxy. His name is Augustine. He is really a founding figure for both Roman Catholics and Protestants — that is, for the whole of the Western Christian tradition.

Augustine was Bishop of Hippo in North Africa in the late Roman Empire in the fourth century AD. He later became known as a Church Father, meaning one of the foundational teachers of the Christian faith at the beginning of the formation of the Western Christian tradition — a figure of immense influence in shaping the way Western Christians, both Catholic and Protestant, think about God, the soul, and what links the two.

In addition to being this immensely influential and authoritative figure — and he really is the most important authority for the Middle Ages after the Bible itself — Augustine is also one of the most passionate souls in the history of the Western tradition. He reveals what his passionate soul is like by displaying it for us in his book the Confessions, which is the first great spiritual autobiography of the West. It displays his lostness, his straying from God, and his return to God in terms that are immensely passionate and moving. Augustine is a man with both a deep mind and a deep heart, and that makes him very attractive to many of his readers. His mind is always alive

and always questioning. His heart is always on fire — sometimes with the wrong kind of love — and that makes his story a genuine drama.

He is also, very importantly, a thinker who draws from both the biblical tradition and the Greek philosophical tradition. He did not know much of Plato or Aristotle directly, but he did read Plotinus and was deeply influenced by Plotinus' spirituality. Augustine is therefore a Christian Platonist who helped form the Western tradition in part by providing a synthesis between Greek thought and biblical thought. There is no single figure more influential in creating that synthesis than Augustine.

The Inner and the Outer: Augustine and Plotinus

Augustine's story of his lost soul in the Confessions is a lostness that can be understood in Plotinian terms. Think of Plotinus' image from the previous lecture of the many souls facing outward, away from the divine center. The outward world, the external world, is metaphorically a world of darkness and literally a world of bodies. When you are engaged in that outward world through desire, lust, pain, and pleasure, you are forgetful of what lies within. That is one of the key dynamics of the story Augustine tells in the Confessions. He sums up much of his life at a crucial point in the tenth book of the Confessions when he says: "You were within me, but I was outside." It is a remarkable image. He was outside himself, out among all those beautiful external things. He calls them temporal beauties — beauties that belong to time. But God was inside: more interior to Augustine than he was to himself, as he says at one point. God is more inward to us than we are to ourselves, and yet we spend most of our time outside ourselves, grasping for those outward beauties, while the true inward beauty shines within and we look away from it toward the outside world.

The external things of this world are, for Augustine, temptations — and yet, crucially, they are not evil. This is a very important point. They are beautiful and good. Those things out there are beauties, temporal rather than eternal beauties, but beauties nonetheless, because God made them. God does not make anything ugly or bad. Everything that exists is good. Indeed, Augustine will say that everything which exists is good, because God made everything that exists.

In this sense, Augustine rejects a certain style of dualism. You can see traces of dualism in Plato when he calls the body evil, but Augustine will never say that. He explicitly rejects a kind of dualism that he knew in its most extreme form in a group called the Manichaeans. Very briefly, the Manichaeans were a group that called themselves Christians, though orthodox Catholics considered them heretics. They held that the body was absolutely filthy — evil, dirty, foul. Think of all that blood and guts: open up a body and it is revolting. The soul, in their view, is a fragment of divine light, pure and clean, imprisoned in that filthy body. This was, in fact, the heresy that Augustine embraced as a young man, because he thought it was more spiritual than the kind of Catholicism he had grown up with.

Imagine a young Augustine, almost a stereotypical bright and arrogant student, who knew he was sharper than the local priest. He asked tough philosophical questions that the priest could not answer, and so he decided he needed something more spiritual than what he saw as the materialistic, worldly Catholicism of his time, which was already a powerful and socially established force. He wanted something purer, something that rose above the foulness of this world. Eventually he changed his mind. By the time he was writing the Confessions, he had firmly rejected that dualism and affirmed that everything that exists — including especially the body — is good, because God made it. That affirmation comes ultimately

from Genesis 1, where God looks at the world he has made and declares it good.

It is worth noting that Plotinus can be combined with this biblical notion to a degree. For Plotinus, everything flows from the One, and although bodies are less good than the soul, which is less good than the Intellect, which is less good than the One, bodies are nonetheless a distant offshoot of the One and still reflect the beauty and goodness of the intelligible world. This is a viewpoint compatible with the orthodox Christian affirmation of the goodness of creation. What it cannot easily be combined with, however, is another element that seems present in Genesis 1 and 2 — the notion that God creates the world as our home. Reading through the first two chapters of the Bible, it looks very much as though God is creating a home for the human race. But for Augustine, as for Plotinus, one might say what the old hymn says: this world is not my home.

This is where I think Augustine and Plotinus have a spirituality that diverges from the plain sense of the Bible, even if believers in Augustinian spirituality can read the Bible in a more spiritual way. They use what is called a letter-spirit hermeneutics, very popular among the Church Fathers and Christian Platonists, which reads a more spiritual meaning into the literal text, especially of the Old Testament. The Old Testament can seem to suggest that happiness consists in reaching the Promised Land and living in a land of milk and honey — which, from a Platonist perspective, looks like a very carnal conception of happiness. A Platonist will say that is a symbol of something more spiritual. The literal land of Israel is certainly not home for these Christian Platonists — in contrast to Jews, for whom it really is home. For Christian Platonists, the Promised Land is a symbol of a spiritual realm, which is our true home.

Augustine's Transformation of the Inner-Outer Distinction

We are familiar with the inner-outer distinction in the modern world — we use it constantly. But the Plotinian version of the inner-outer, discussed in the previous lecture, should feel at least somewhat unfamiliar. For Plotinus, the inner world is the world of the divine mind itself. It is Augustine who gives us the inner-outer distinction as we now know it: the notion of a private inner world, a world into which I enter and find not the mind of God, but simply my own inner space, my own private world.

This is because Augustine is drawn to Plotinus but knows that as an orthodox Catholic he cannot accept all of Plotinus. He is genuinely attracted to this image of turning inward — of finding God within the self rather than out there in the physical world. But when Augustine turns inward, he cannot simply say "that is God," because for Augustine, as for any orthodox Catholic, the soul is not God. The soul is not divine. The soul is something God made, and therefore the soul is fundamentally and eternally other than God. You cannot turn into your own self and find God directly.

So for Augustine, instead of turning inward and thereby being united with God as in Plotinus, you turn inward and then look upward. There is a movement in, and then up. You enter this private inner world and look upward at that divine sun — again the Platonic image — the divine sun which is God, shining above your mind. God is above your mind because he is the one who created it. The divine sun is above what it made. So there is this double movement: instead of simply a turn inward, there is a turn inward followed by a look upward. And this means that the inner space of the soul is our own space — it is not the same thing as the mind of God.

Therefore we have a private inner space, our own inner world: the world of memory, as Augustine will elaborate it, as well as imagination and thought. The first thing we encounter when we enter our own minds is our own private thoughts, invisible to everyone else. It is only when we look upward that we see what everyone can see — what anyone, entering into themselves and looking up, can behold. The initial stage — being inside but not yet looking upward — is your private inner world. And I think this is the origin of modern thinking about the inner self as a private interior realm.

When you do enter into yourself and then look upward, what is happening? It is, I believe, that same notion of intellectual vision that we find in Plato and Plotinus — though this is a point scholars debate. This is the mind's eye looking toward the form of the Good, that sun shining down on the world of forms. The Catholic tradition will later call this the beatific vision — the vision that makes us happy, which is what beatific means. But it is an intellectual vision, a vision of the mind's eye, the intellect.

We cannot attain the beatific vision simply by turning inward and looking upward in this life. The beatific vision is the state of being we will have in what could metaphorically be called heaven. Augustine does not literally believe that souls travel upward to some physical location. The literal truth, for Augustine, is that heaven — eternal life — consists in seeing God with the mind's eye. That is what beatific vision is. That is what all the imagery of heaven in the Bible is really about. But it is something like passing from the realm of this world to another world, and we do not attain a permanent beatific vision until after death.

In this life, when our minds are deeply imperfect and clouded by sin, when we enter into ourselves and look up, we might catch a glimpse of God — or we might not. We might simply remain stuck in the mud

of our own souls. But if we do look up, we might catch a glimpse of God, though the light is so brilliant that we are dazzled. The mind's eye cannot absorb all that light. It is like looking directly at the sun: it darkens your eyes, blinds you momentarily, and you have to look away. So the experience of that beatific glimpse — that glimpse of God's being that Augustine describes — is followed immediately by the experience of dazzlement and of falling back down into the region of darkness and unlikeness to God. Augustine describes a kind of mystical and intellectual experience of the mind taking in more light than it can bear. When our minds are perfected after death, however, we will be able to receive all of that light and enjoy it forever.

Love, the Will, and the Motive Force of the Soul

That is Augustine's picture of what we are ultimately aiming for. We think our lives are about all these beautiful things in the external world, but what life is really about is seeing God. We need to make that movement away from external things toward God. The Confessions is the story of how that happens. But we need to add another conceptual element to the picture: love.

What is the force that drives the soul's movement? The force that drives all movements of the soul is love. Whenever the soul moves in any direction — inward, outward, upward — it is moved by love. The part of the soul that loves is called the will. Free will, or simply the will, is that aspect of ourselves which loves, just as the intellect is the aspect of ourselves which understands. Love is the motive force; it is what drives us toward what we love.

Augustine says in a famous passage in the Confessions: "My love is my weight." In ancient physics, weight could drive you downward, but it could also drive you upward — fire has a weight that drives it

upward, earth has a weight that pulls it downward. Love for God — charity, in Augustine's technical terminology — is like a fire in the heart that drives us upward toward God. Whereas love for material things makes our hearts heavy and muddy, and down we go, among things that are dirty, mortal, and ultimately deadly.

Love is this motive force, and its aim — and ultimately its effect — is to unite us with what we love. Love is a unifying force, deeply crucial for Augustine as it is for Plotinus. Love unites us with what we love; it glues us to it, makes us cling to it. Most importantly, this is how one friend is bound to another: they become, as Augustine will say, one heart, one soul. Love drives our souls to unite with what we love and to seek our happiness there — to seek what Augustine calls rest. For love is restless, but it wants to find rest in the beloved. And so Augustine says at the very beginning of the Confessions, in a passage that has become one of the most celebrated sentences in Western literature: "Our hearts are restless until they find rest in Thee" — that is, in God.

Here is the problem: we love the things of the external world, but those things are transitory, shifting, mortal, and ultimately deceptive. The happiness we long for can only be had in a stable, eternal, and truly satisfying way by clinging to God. Love for God leads us to cling to the one thing that will genuinely make us happy — God, in beatific vision. But instead, most of us, most of the time — including Augustine himself — cling to things out in the external world that cannot ultimately make us happy.

This is fairly easy to see. Some people cling to money, as though accumulating wealth will make them happy. We know that is not true. There is a temporary happiness in it, but it will not make people ultimately happy. The same is true for most sensual pleasures. Augustine offers the example of a drunk man he encounters in the street who was happy for a little while, until the hangover came. But

Augustine at that point in his life was a young man on the rise — a social climber — and he says he was in a far worse state than the drunkard. He was trying to cling to wealth, influence, and power, and it was much harder to undeceive himself about it. The drunkard woke up the next morning knowing perfectly well he was not happy. Augustine, by contrast, thought he was pursuing happiness in the false life he was leading.

Disordered Love and Sin

When we cling to things that do not give us real happiness, that is called sin. It is not that we should not love things other than God — but we should not try to find our ultimate happiness in them. And the punishment for trying to find ultimate happiness in things that cannot provide it is simply that we do not get the happiness we are looking for.

The most striking example involves the best love of all — other than the love of God. The love of God is the best love, but the second best thing in the universe, for Augustine as for Aristotle and all ancient thinkers, is friendship. When we unite ourselves with a friend, it is sweet and lovely, far better than money or pleasure or any of those other things. It is the best thing next to uniting with God. But your friend is mortal. Cling to your friend, and you will lose — just as with everything else — because you are loving what is mortal as if it could make you eternally happy.

Augustine conveys this message through one of the most remarkable passages in all of Western literature. He is one of the great poets of grief, because he knows firsthand what it is to cling to something mortal and try to find ultimate happiness in what will inevitably slip through his fingers. Here is how he describes the death of a close friend in his youth:

At this sorrow my heart was utterly darkened, and whatever I looked upon was death. My native country was a torture to me, and my father's house a marvelous unhappiness. And whatever I had participated in with my friend, now that it lacked him, was turned into a frightful torment. My eyes looked for him everywhere, but he was not given to them. I hated all places because he was not in them. Nor could they now say to me, "Look, he's coming," as they did when he was alive and absent.

Imagine the whole world as an absence — the absence of the one you love who has now died. Augustine continues: "I became a great question to myself. And I asked my soul, why was she so sad? Why was she so exceedingly troubled within me? But she knew not how to answer me."

That is the result of a wayward and disordered love. Even love for friends, if we place it above love for God, will make us miserable. All loves other than God, if we put them first, will ultimately make us miserable.

Grace and the Divided Will

What is needed — and here we move from the dark side of wandering and lostness to grace and happiness — is a turning of the soul and its will away from these external beauties toward the inner beauty of God. All that seems to be needed is a decision to turn. And as Augustine says in one of his early works, what could be more in our own power than our own will?

That was an early, optimistic statement. By the time he writes the Confessions, things are far more complicated. It turns out that we are not in full control of our own wills, because love forms habits. If you have gotten into the habit of drinking too much each evening, you will find that habit very hard to break. Augustine found the habit of

sexual attachment very hard to break. He had been living with a woman for fifteen years, and turning wholly to God meant turning away from that, which was profoundly difficult. Any deep habit of love is a habit that resists being broken. And that means our wills become divided against themselves. On the one hand, we want to turn our whole will to God. On the other hand, there is this lingering attachment, this adhesive bond that makes it hard to pull away.

Augustine describes this memorably in book eight of the Confessions, in the events leading up to his conversion. He compares it to the experience of trying to wake up in the morning. You know you are supposed to get up. The wiser and better part of yourself says: come on, it is time, you have to get up, this is the right thing to do, this is what will ultimately make you happier. But the other part of you says: just a little while longer, not yet, let me hit the snooze button. There are these two sides of yourself — it is only one self, only one will, and yet it fights against itself. Augustine is one of the great poets of that inner conflict: the longing to wake up and find the truth, alongside the lingering, luscious pleasure of staying half asleep.

The implication is that we cannot simply turn our own wills on our own. We want to turn to God, but we cannot fully manage it, at least not by ourselves. That is where grace comes in.

The Doctrine of Grace

This is a crucial Augustinian notion. He draws the language from Paul, and some of the ideas as well, but he develops his own doctrine of grace that becomes absolutely central to later Western thought. His reasoning runs as follows: if I delighted enough in God, I would find it easy to turn from these other loves to God. If you are falling in love with God, as some people do, then giving up these other things

becomes natural. What you need, therefore, is something that will set your heart afire with love for God. But you cannot simply choose to fall in love.

Plato observed this a long time ago, and there is a genuinely Platonic element in this Augustinian notion of grace. We cannot simply decide what we will delight in, because we are weighed down by all these old carnal habits of delighting in external things. Grace, then, is God's inward gift: he gives it to us inwardly so that our will finds it sweet and delightful to love God above all else. Grace, at its core, means the gift of falling in love with God. As Augustine will say, all things are easy for love. If you are passionately in love with God, you will find it easy to give up drinking, or old lovers, or money, or whatever other carnal attachments draw you away from God.

What is happening here, I think, is that Augustine is taking Paul's language about grace and interpreting it partly in Platonic terms — in terms of a love that desires these higher truths and that works like falling in love. Remember how in Plato the love for eternal beauty is something we recollect and are reminded of by our love for earthly beauties. Falling in love is fundamental to Platonic spirituality, and what we must fall in love with above all is eternal truth — that is, God.

Notice that this means grace and free will are compatible in an important way. When God gives us grace, it turns our will toward what we truly want. It helps us wake up; it gives us the freedom to wake up and resist that lower, more carnal, more pleasure-seeking part of ourselves. Grace does not overcome free will — it helps free will do what it genuinely wants to do. But it does mean that free will is not sufficient by itself. Without the help of grace, our free will will not find God. Grace strengthens and liberates our free will, but free will is not enough on its own. That is a very important point for Augustine.

Justification by Faith

In the larger doctrinal framework Augustine develops in his later works, he elaborates an interpretation of justification by faith — that Pauline notion we encountered earlier in Paul's letters — centered on how grace leads us to love God. The process begins with faith, which leads us to pray. In faith toward God, believing that he will help us, we pray for grace, as Augustine himself did during his struggle toward conversion. God then gives the gift of grace, and that grace causes us to love God, which is obedience to the great commandment — to love God with your whole heart, mind, and strength. Loving God in that way is righteousness, that key Pauline term. Righteousness consists in obeying God's commands, and God's commands consist above all in loving God. Through this process, which begins with faith, we become righteous — we love God as we are supposed to. And that will eventually lead to the beatific vision. Augustine calls this whole process justification by faith, and he understands it to be what Paul is talking about.

I suggested earlier, when discussing Paul, that this is not quite what Paul had in mind. But it becomes the foundational understanding of Paul in the Western Christian tradition. It has a great deal in common with Paul, but it is fundamentally about the relationship between God and the individual soul, rather than about the relationship between Jews and Gentiles in the Christian community, which was Paul's primary concern.

Augustine adopts Paul's language contrasting living under the law and living by grace. Living under the law means trying to love God by your own free will, through good works and moral effort alone. Living by grace means praying for grace, being justified by grace,

and learning to love God by falling in love with him through this gift freely given.

Prevenient Grace and Predestination

Late in Augustine's career, a crucial question arises. We have been describing justification by faith as a process that starts with belief and leads to love and ultimately to God himself in beatific vision. But if it starts with faith, does that mean that the whole process leading to our salvation begins with us — with our own decision to believe? At that initial moment, is it up to us to start the whole thing in motion simply by deciding to have faith and to pray?

Augustine avoided answering this question for a long time, because he wanted to affirm that our will is an active participant — that our love is what drives us — while also affirming that salvation is by grace and that we cannot do it without God's help. At that initial moment of the first decision for God, what is it that causes what? Is grace first, or is faith first?

In his later works, Augustine says: grace is first. We cannot even believe without the gift of grace. Before we ask for grace, we must already have received grace in order to be able to ask. If we pray for grace, that is itself because God has already given us the grace to have faith and to pray. Grace is, as the technical term puts it, prevenient — coming before, from the Latin for to come before. Grace comes before even our decision to believe. It makes everything possible. We cannot save ourselves. Salvation, from beginning to end, is fundamentally the work of God rather than of ourselves.

For someone with a deep and painful awareness of their own sinfulness and weakness, this can be profoundly comforting. As Luther would later say, I am not strong enough to save myself — and

so the thought that God, from beginning to end, is the one who has determined to save you is genuinely wonderful. The difficulty arises, however, when you think about those to whom God does not give grace, a question we touched on when discussing Paul. If God does not give grace to everyone, the question about predestination follows immediately. Why does God give grace to some and not to others?

Augustine's answer is that God is gracious and owes grace to no one. No one deserves grace. So God gives grace to some undeserving sinners and not to others. This is unequal treatment, but it is not unjust: those who do not receive grace are punished for their own sins, which they deserve, while those who do receive grace receive undeserved mercy. No one gets less than they deserve; many people get more than they deserve. That is Augustine's justification for it. But it does give rise to the profound anxiety of predestination: am I among those predestined to be saved, or am I not? We will return to that question and that anxiety when we come to the Protestant theologians Luther and Calvin.

Lecture 20: Aquinas and Christian Aristotelianism

Professor Jeremy Adams

Introduction

One of Thomas Aquinas' most important contributions to the ongoing current of Western thought was his adaptation of Aristotelian thought — and especially of Aristotelian philosophical method — to the needs of the Christian philosophy and theology of his own time. This appears clearly in six aspects of the Aristotelian legacy that Aquinas adopted and made integral to his own system: logic, epistemology, teleology, motion, politics, and legal thinking. Some understanding of Aquinas' social background, his institutional context within the Dominican Order, and the intellectual discourse of the medieval university will help us grasp his significance for both his own time and ours.

Life and Background

Aquinas was born probably in 1225 and died certainly on the 7th of March, 1274, at the age of forty-nine. He was the son of a South Italian noble house, very well connected to the ruling dynasty of the Kingdom of Sicily and to the international European aristocracy of thirteenth-century Western Europe. There is even a claim that Thomas was a kind of grand-nephew of the Holy Roman Emperor, though that may be an exaggerated genealogical assertion. In any event, his family was extremely well placed in the world of his age. More significant than his social connections, however, are his education and institutional affiliations.

He was a child of the new university system, which had emerged at Bologna, Paris, and Oxford in the second half of the twelfth century

and had begun to produce its own offspring throughout Europe. The university was designed to train professionals, and train professionals it did. One of the most consummate professionals it ever produced was Thomas Aquinas.

Aquinas was also the star of the even newer Dominican Order, finally approved by the Pope in the first decade of the thirteenth century. This was a pan-European — indeed, more than pan-European — elite order of friars dedicated single-mindedly to the strengthening and extension of their vision of Christian orthodoxy. A little after Thomas' own lifetime, there would be a Dominican Archbishop of Peking, and during Thomas' lifetime the Dominican Order was organized into sixteen provinces stretching from Morocco to China.

Education

Aquinas was educated at several different institutions. First, at the venerable Benedictine monastery of Monte Cassino, near his birthplace south of Rome. Thomas grew up in a remarkable valley in the Roman Campagna that had been home to Cicero, to Marius, to Benedict himself (the founder of the Benedictine order in his final years), and ultimately to Aquinas. He was raised at Monte Cassino from about the age of five until his early teens.

He was then sent to the University of Naples, founded in 1224 by his kinsman King Frederick II — who was king not merely of the island of Sicily but of the southern forty percent of the entire Italian peninsula. There, Thomas achieved what we might call his *Artium Baccalaureatus*, the basic course of the seven liberal arts. The most consequential course he took there, both in terms of what the curriculum offered and in terms of its long-range intellectual impact, was a course on Aristotle taught by a remarkable cleric who

interpreted Aristotle according to the reading of the Muslim scholar Averroes of Córdoba.

Averroes was a deeply dangerous figure in the eyes of both Islamic and Christian orthodoxy. He was declared a heretic by his own Muslim faith as well as by most Christians, and for a clear reason: the most dangerous of his doctrines, drawn directly from his reading of Aristotle, was the denial of the immortality of the individual soul — one of the most fundamentally important beliefs shared by Islam, Christianity, and rabbinical Judaism alike.

Aristotle's own comments on what happens to the human soul after the death of the body are genuinely ambiguous. Averroes interpreted them as leading to the very clear conclusion that the human person dies with the death of the body and that there is nothing in the way of a personal afterlife. Part of the soul's component, in his reading, might return to a great reservoir of active intellect in the world, but the individual personality simply disappears. This is a profoundly threatening doctrine, striking at the very root of all three Abrahamic faiths.

After Naples, Thomas went to the University of Paris, where he earned what we would call his MA degree and his STD — his Doctorate of Sacred Theology — at a remarkably young age. He taught thereafter at Paris, at the itinerant Papal University in Italy (which traveled with the Pope and the Curia to whichever Italian city they occupied, since Rome was already in the thirteenth century a dangerous place on account of malaria as well as the risk of political upheaval), and finally at the University of Naples where he had first been trained. By the time of his death at forty-nine, he was the author of somewhere between sixty and a hundred titles, depending on how different editors have combined and separated his many works — a vast body of writing, occupying many thick volumes even when printed on the thinnest of paper.

The Tradition of Creative Aristotelianism

Aquinas was, among other things, the last great creative commentator on Aristotle's philosophy. His predecessors in that intellectual activity of respectful but autonomous adaptation were several, and it is a curious fact that their names all begin, in the Roman alphabet at least, with the letter A: Alexander of Aphrodisias, Avicenna, Averroes, Albertus Magnus, and Aquinas himself — surely nothing more than an accident.

The first of these significant interpreters was Alexander of Aphrodisias, a Greek who flourished between approximately 198 and 220 of the Common Era. He was lecturing on Aristotle at the Lyceum in Athens — the school Aristotle himself had founded — between roughly 198 and 211 CE, and seems to have remained in Athens for perhaps another ten years before we lose track of him. Alexander eloquently defended Aristotelian logic, which had been under attack by Stoics, Epicureans, and Skeptics ever since a generation after Aristotle's own death in 322 BCE. He was notably independent, however: rather than following Aristotle on the question of universals toward what we call moderate realism, Alexander was a nominalist, and he also denied the immortality of the soul, as would the later commentator Averroes. He is thus a deep admirer of Aristotle who uses Aristotle creatively without being slavishly obedient to him.

Eight centuries later, there arose in Bukhara in Central Asia — that brilliant oasis of culture in the middle of the deserts of what are today Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan, the great corridor between Chinese and West Asian civilization — a man known as Ibn Sina, more formally Muhammad ibn Sina, whose name was transformed into the Latin *Avicenna*, the form by which he was most widely known in the medieval West. He was born around 980 CE and

died in 1037. Avicenna tried to combine Neoplatonic doctrine with Aristotelian doctrine and was particularly interested in Aristotle's physical and biological teachings, especially human biology. He compiled Aristotle's medical thought into a great work known as the *Kulliyat*, which was taught in Western universities in Latin translation well into the seventeenth century — marking the last period in which Aristotle remained a living creative force in Western thought in that domain.

After Ibn Sina in the Muslim Aristotelian tradition came the great Ibn Rushd — to give him his proper name, Muhammad ibn Ahmad ibn Rushd — whose name was deformed into the Latin *Averroes*. Born in Córdoba in Spain to a very aristocratic Hispano-Arabic family in 1126 and dying in 1198, Averroes had a remarkable career: first as a jurist of Islamic law, then as an advisor to the Almohad rulers of Spain, who protected him from the worst consequences of his extremely radical doctrines. He rejected much of Muslim orthodoxy in favor of what he took to be Aristotelian truth, most notably regarding the immortality of the soul. He was independent-minded enough also to dismiss Aristotle's own *Politics* entirely, substituting for it in his long series of Aristotelian commentaries his own interpretation of Plato's *Republic*. There he did something quite remarkable: he decided that the philosopher-king proposed by Plato, and simply dismissed by Aristotle without serious engagement, was represented in his own time by the imam — the supremely enlightened leader of Islam — a major figure in Islamic political thought.

Aquinas' own teacher, first at Paris and then at Cologne, was Albert the Great — *Albertus Magnus* — the great German naturalist who interpreted much of Aristotle's doctrine and passed on his logic, while at the same time questioning Aristotle's natural science, especially his biology. Albert was deeply skeptical of various things Aristotle asserted about the origin of different species, and he set

out to conduct practical experiments and to direct his students to test Aristotle's claims empirically. This can be seen, I think, as the beginning of empirical experimentation in the Western scientific tradition, or at least as its medieval revival, since while the ancient Greeks had done something of the kind, that tradition had been forgotten. Albert revived it in the early thirteenth century and passed on his understanding of Aristotle to Thomas Aquinas.

The line of creative Aristotelians ended with the great Pietro Pomponazzi, a Renaissance scholar and professor at the University of Padua, born in 1462 and dying in 1525. What Pomponazzi strove to do was to restore integral Aristotelianism — Aristotle as he understood himself, as he was understood by his own fourth-century Greek contemporaries. Pomponazzi succeeded in doing precisely that, but once he did, Aristotle died as a source of fresh philosophical creativity. He became an appropriate subject for the history of philosophy rather than for its living practice.

Aquinas' Creatively Critical Aristotelianism

The Eternity of the World

Some of the key instances of Aquinas' creatively critical engagement with Aristotle begin with his teaching on the eternity of the world. Aristotle was convinced that the world was eternal. No Christian could adhere to that doctrine and remain orthodox, because the Bible states plainly: "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." The Hebrew vision of the origin of the cosmos is one of an interventionist God who begins time and begins the universe at a particular moment — and who will presumably end it in a comparable fashion — as opposed to the Greek vision of a universe that has always existed. This was a very difficult problem for Thomas, who was simultaneously a serious Christian and a serious

Aristotelian. He resolved it by applying Aristotle's own logic against Aristotle's conclusion. He argued that Aristotle had not successfully demonstrated the eternity of the world with the rigor his own logical method demanded. Logic, said Aquinas, could prove neither the world's eternity nor the contrary. Aristotle had delivered his opinion on the matter as an authority rather than proving it as a logician, and on that point the authority of God as expressed in the Bible was, for Aquinas, of considerably greater significance.

The Nature of the Human Being

Related to this was Aquinas' treatment of the nature of the human person. For Aristotle, the soul is the form of the body — the doctrine known as hylomorphism. The soul does not merely give the body its shape; it gives it its purpose and direction. This stands in contrast to Plato's view, in which the soul is imprisoned in the body and eager to escape its chains as soon as possible. Aristotle valued the body and sense data deeply, and saw the soul's importance as being the informing principle of the whole human being.

The critical question was what happens to the soul when the body dies. Alexander of Aphrodisias and Averroes had concluded that the individual person dies with the body. Thomas, of course, had to reject this conclusion, but he did so through a very close examination of both Aristotle and the Platonic tradition as expressed by Augustine. Remarkably, he managed to combine not simply elements of these two teachings but their underlying structures to create a new anthropology — one that, as it turns out, resonates more with twentieth-century understandings of biblical anthropology and even with existentialism than it does with strict Aristotelianism. It is closer to the Christian Aristotelianism of Augustine than to integral Aristotelianism, but it remains deeply motivated by the desire to preserve Aristotle's notion of the soul as the form of the body. Thomas argued that because the soul's fundamental function is

epistemologically spiritual — oriented toward truths of a spiritual nature as well as material sense-knowledge — it survives the death of the body.

Logic

Aquinas accepted Aristotle's logical thought integrally and without reservation. Even when he disagreed with Aristotle — on the eternity of the world, on the immortality of the soul — he did so by using Aristotle's own logic to criticize Aristotle's conclusions. This is perhaps the most characteristic feature of his method.

Epistemology

Following Aristotle, Aquinas held that knowledge derived from sense data is central and determinative. What we know begins with what our senses collect. At the same time, he maintained that the soul's function includes the apprehension of spiritual truths as well, and it is precisely this spiritual dimension of its epistemic function that grounds his argument for the soul's survival of bodily death.

Teleology: The Birds

Aquinas' thought was resolutely teleological throughout — constantly concerned with establishing the end or purpose of any being or any action. He expressed this teleological reasoning in his work on biology, ethics, politics, cosmology, and theology alike. There is a charming story that illustrates his instinctive teleological sensibility. Thomas liked to study and teach and was reluctant to waste time in social encounters. On one occasion, however, a great nobleman of vast wealth was so determined to meet him that Thomas' superior in the Dominican house in Paris asked him, please, for the good of the order if not for yourself, to speak with this man. So Thomas and the Duke walked down from the Montagne Sainte-Geneviève, where the university and the Dominican house were located, along the Rue Saint-Jacques down to the River Seine, to the

place still called today the Quai aux Fleurs, where flowers and birds in cages are sold. Thomas turned to the great gentleman and said: "You say you wish to do something for me. Very well — buy all the birds." The Duke was delighted and sent his agents, who bought every bird and assembled a great pile of cages in front of Thomas. And Thomas said: "Open the doors." The birds all flew out, to the horror of the merchants and the astonishment of the Duke. But nothing could have been a more purely teleological reaction. Why does a bird exist? A bird exists to fly. To keep a bird from flying is to commit a grave offense against nature.

Motion and the Proofs for the Existence of God

Aristotle's doctrine of motion was adopted by Aquinas in developing his proofs for the existence of God. In the *Summa Theologiae* — sometimes called the *Summa Theologica* — that enormous work in three great parts occupying roughly five vast volumes, Aquinas presents five proofs for the existence of God in Part One, Question Two, Article Three. These proofs are familiar to anyone educated in Western church schools or to those who have taken introductory philosophy courses that engage with or critique this tradition. Of the five proofs, two — the proof from motion and the proof from contingency, or the necessity of being — depend heavily on Aristotle's doctrine of motion.

It is important to recognize that for Aristotle, motion involved not merely physical movement but the reduction of potency to act, the movement of potentiality toward actuality. Thus the operation of the entire universe is explained by motion: a causal motion with a purpose, a point, and a direction, which often involves the physical movement of one thing from one place to another, but need not do so, and for which physical displacement is not even the primary case.

Political Philosophy

In political philosophy, Aquinas followed Aristotle quite closely, though again not in every detail. For Aquinas, as for Aristotle, the state was natural to the human condition. This was a significant departure from Augustine and most Western Christian thinkers since him, who had maintained that the state was a punitive consequence of original sin — that we would not need the institutions of civil government if our forebears had not gravely messed up in the Garden of Eden. For Aquinas, by contrast, the human being is a political animal who needs civil society in order to reach fulfillment, to achieve his own teleological end. The state is therefore entirely natural and, indeed, one of the noblest expressions of the human condition.

Like Aristotle, Aquinas considered mixed government — a combination of monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy — the best form of government. He favored monarchy more strongly than Aristotle had; some have attributed this to his sympathy for papal theocracy. At the same time, it is worth noting that Aquinas considered a form of government that was democratic, somewhat tempered by aristocracy but without a monarchical element, to be the most appropriate form for the city-states of his contemporary Italy. This is interesting because most of those city-states resembled in almost every important respect the ideal *polis* that Aristotle had described in the *Politics*: a community of at most fifty thousand citizens with a mixed government and a high degree of civic participation. Thomas would follow the basic insights of Aristotle without always adhering to his precise prescriptions.

The Doctrine of Law

In his distinctive doctrine of law, Aquinas combined the main lines of Aristotle's political thought with the Stoic doctrine of natural law and added several original features. According to Aquinas, there are four or perhaps five major kinds of law. First, there is the eternal law of God governing his created universe, of which scientific laws form a part. Second, there is natural law, inherent in human nature itself. Third, there is divine positive law, specifically legislated for human conduct — found, for example, in the legal regulations of the Hebrew scriptures and in the precepts and canon law of the Church. These three constitute the main forms of divine law: eternal law, natural law, and divine positive law. Fourth, there is human positive law, enacted by human legislators. Fifth and finally, there is human custom, which functions as a kind of law in itself so long as it does not conflict with natural law.

Central to Thomas' understanding of law is the conviction that no genuine divine law could possibly conflict with natural law, since both proceed from the same supreme legislator, God. Any human statute or custom inconsistent with natural law has no real force: it is not a genuine law at all, because it does not conform to the teleological nature of the human being.

Controversy, Condemnation, and Canonization

Even during his own lifetime, there was a strong negative reaction to Aquinas' most Aristotelian teachings. This reaction crystallized into a movement to condemn Thomism — the body of Thomas' teachings, defined essentially by its Aristotelian premises — as heresy. The leading thinkers of the Dominican Order's chief rival, the Franciscan Order, led this campaign. It culminated in the Bishop of Paris, Étienne Tempier, and two successive Archbishops of Canterbury (one a

Dominican, one a Franciscan) condemning various of Aquinas' teachings and eventually declaring some of them formal heresies — thereby implying, though few went quite so far as to say it explicitly, that Thomas Aquinas himself was a heretic on account of his Aristotelianism.

The Dominican Order reacted vigorously. In 1277, just after Tempier's condemnation of 219 propositions then being taught at the University of Paris, the Dominican Order at its annual general chapter meeting defended those of the 219 that had been taught by Thomas. A few weeks later, the Archbishop of Canterbury declared that body of propositions — with particular emphasis on those of Thomas — to be wrong or inappropriate, and then in 1284 declared some of them formally heretical. The same Archbishop also offered the faculty of the University of Oxford special papal indulgences for refraining from teaching any of Thomas' and related Aristotelians' propositions. The Oxford faculty accepted part of this offer and declined part of it — so independent were the universities in their own time.

A careful look at the dates of these various condemnations reveals a degree of coordination between Franciscans and some Dominican allies in France and England, though the papacy held back from joining them. In 1323, Pope John XXII declared Thomas Aquinas a saint and applied to him the epithet *Doctor Communis* — the common doctor, whose teaching should be common to all the theology faculties of Christendom. That was a pious papal opinion, however, and had little practical impact on university teaching.

By 1323, in fact, Aristotle's logic was already under serious challenge from the nominalist left — a group of young scholars who questioned both Aristotle and Thomas on logical grounds and who would carry the field for quite some time thereafter.

The Revival of Thomism

In later centuries, Thomism was vigorously revived. Even if Thomist Aristotelianism was less dominant in its own time than we might expect, it proved remarkably durable. In 1879, Pope Leo XIII — one of the most radical thinkers of the modern papacy, a man who developed a Christian social doctrine seeking a third way between Marxism and capitalism — issued the papal encyclical *Aeterni Patris*, which praised Aquinas as the *Doctor Communis* of all Catholic thinkers and urged all Catholic professors and universities to revive Thomism, which indeed occurred.

Neo-Thomism, as this tradition is generally known, flourished for roughly a century in Germany, France, Italy, and later in Britain, the Americas, and beyond, with notable contributions from the University of Manila and from various Japanese universities as well. Eventually, however, even in Catholic academic circles this tradition began to lose its appeal. This decline led to a broad dismissal of Thomistic teaching in Catholic universities — a tendency that the present papacy, through documents such as *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, is seeking to reverse by urging Catholic universities to return to the core of Catholic orthodoxy in the teaching of philosophy and theology, with an implicit and sometimes explicit revival of Thomism and Aristotelian Christian philosophy.

At the very end of the twentieth century, there also emerged from a quite different direction — not from the papacy or from orthodox Catholic scholarship but from deconstructionist thinkers, few of whom profess any religious identity themselves — what might be called a neo-Neo-Thomism: a philosophical movement attempting to recast Thomism and Neo-Thomism in the light of such thinkers as Michel Foucault and Jacques Lacan.

Aquinas' Epithets for the Great Thinkers

In all of these movements — the Neo-Neo-Thomism of recent decades, the Neo-Thomism of the century after Leo XIII, and the Thomism of the medieval universities — we find a fundamental commitment to the thought of the philosopher whom Thomas Aquinas simply called "the Philosopher." This is a revealing feature of Aquinas' style, for it is worth noting that he strove for a style that was without style: a prose of absolute scientific purity, even more deliberately stripped of lyrical flourish than Aristotle's own writing. In such a style, when a small preference or a signal of particular esteem breaks through, it carries great weight.

Thomas speaks of Paul as "the Apostle." He speaks of Moses Maimonides — the great Jewish Aristotelian, also of Córdoba — as "Rabbi Moses." He speaks of Averroes as "the Commentator," though there were of course many commentators on Aristotle and on other philosophers. But when he speaks of Aristotle himself, he refers to him simply as "the Philosopher." Not Plato. Not Augustine. It is for this pagan worshipper of very impersonal and distant gods that Aquinas reserved the supreme philosophical compliment.

Lecture 21: Universals in Medieval Thought

Professor Jeremy Adams

The Problem of Universals

Let's talk about the vexed problem of universals in Western philosophy. By universals, I mean the relationship of names to things, and of both of those to the standard categories in the Western analysis of phenomena — like the individual, the species, the genus, and so on.

This problem was explored and temporarily resolved in the Middle Ages thanks to a kind of dialectical triad. First of all, there was a realist thesis, which was very much favored by Christian theology because realist philosophy, as understood then, was very convenient to the formulation of Christian doctrine. Then there arose, inevitably, as such things do, a nominalist antithesis, which seemed to challenge — at least to put into some question — some of the favorite doctrines, some of the favorite explanations of Christian theology. And thirdly, Peter Abelard came along with a synthesis called conceptualism, which was an immediate success. It was accepted by thinkers for the next century and a half — Thomas Aquinas and others who knew Aristotle, and who could have ignored Abelard's solution because it was in fact very like Aristotle's, nevertheless liked the way that Abelard presented the conceptualist response to the problem so much that it became a standard part of Western thought.

The problem remains settled for a little more than that century and a half, though. And since the 14th century, many thinkers — scientists and theologians as well as philosophers — have tended to fall into either the realist, the nominalist, or the conceptualist camp on this set of issues.

The problem of universals is a philosophical issue which questions the relationship between names and things, and between the various categories in which we tend to classify names, things, and other phenomena — genera, species, individuals, and so on. This issue has arisen in practically every vital period of philosophical speculation, and its medieval expression reveals a great deal about both classical sources and modern permutations of this durable issue.

Aristotle, Porphyry, and Boethius: The Background

Aristotle reached some conclusions about the relationship between names and things. Moderns who have done the history of philosophy tend to label his teaching on that score moderate realism. He's not an absolute realist, but he's not a nominalist either. He was, however, innocent of the conceptualist doctrine which Peter Abelard developed to solve the problem.

The pagan philosopher Porphyry, who was probably born about 233 CE and who died at some point after 301, produced a summary discussion of Aristotle's complex logical teachings which he named the Isagoge in Greek. This was basically a commentary on Aristotle's book of categories — the book of categories which the young Augustine had read and by which he had not been very impressed. But it remained a very widespread book.

Porphyry himself is a very interesting figure. He was a pagan philosopher born in the city of Tyre in Phoenicia who got interested in Christianity, but his interest turned out to be little more than a flirtation. He then got much more attracted by Judaism and tended towards a kind of highly philosophical Judaism, which must have disturbed some of the contemporary rabbis, although it certainly appealed to some of them and certainly served as an occasion for

proselytism — for converting more and more people from the polytheistic world of the Mediterranean to Jewish belief.

Now, Porphyry's Isagoge survived the collapse of classical Mediterranean civilization better than any of Aristotle's own works on logic. Those would remain unknown to Western thinkers until about the mid-12th century, roughly 1150, when they came back into the knowledge of West Europeans thanks to Latin translations — first from Arabic translations of Aristotle's Greek, and then Latin translations directly from Aristotle's own Greek. Porphyry's Isagoge, however, was standard reading for any student of logic in the early medieval West from the 4th century until the mid-12th. In that work, Porphyry restated the problem of universals but proposed no solution. As always with Porphyry, it's the flirtation that is interesting rather than the consummation of the intellectual relationship.

The Christian philosopher Boethius, born in 480 and dying in 523 — too young, executed on the charge of treason by the Ostrogothic king of Italy — had hoped to translate all the works of Plato and Aristotle into Latin and to resolve their differences, an enormous project that no one has ever come anywhere near achieving. He did succeed in translating the Isagoge into Latin, and thus it became the standard textbook for Western European thinkers not since the 4th century but since the 6th, from the 520s or perhaps the 510s, when Boethius was able to render it into his own language. Boethius elsewhere in his writings also left very tempting references to the universals question, but referring to it only.

Now, Boethius had tremendous credibility and tremendous prestige in medieval Western Christianity. He seemed to be a kind of martyr. And the book of his which practically every medieval intellectual knew was the Consolation of Philosophy — Boethius, imprisoned, is visited in a dream by Lady Philosophy, and they have a dialogue about justice, injustice, providence, fate, free will, all those great

issues. We tend to look back on Augustine's Confessions as the great work of the late patristic age, of the end of antique Christian thought. But Augustine's Confessions would not really be discovered and injected into the mainstream of Western speculation until the 17th century. Over the Middle Ages, it was Boethius' Consolation, and thanks to the tremendous prestige of the Consolation of Philosophy, references to the philosophical issue of universals became standard in Western speculation.

The Realist Thesis

In the late 10th century, West European schools — especially in France for some reason — took up the question once more. In the second half of the 11th century, two schools fought on the issue. The realist school and the nominalist school presented themselves.

Realist thinkers maintained that the names for things were adequate indicators of the things they designated. Thus names were real signs of the things they denoted. A favorite explanatory phrase — not exactly a definition — for names was notae rerum, notes of things. It's important to recognize that what the modern vernacular English language thinks realism means is not at all what realism meant in this particular discussion. If anything, the realists were the less realistic from the modern American point of view.

One of the most outstanding realist thinkers was Lanfranc, born about 1010 in northern Italy and dying as Archbishop of Canterbury in the year 1089. Lanfranc was a north Italian who taught law — canon law — in the schools of Italy and of France, and eventually became the prior of the school at the Benedictine monastery of Bec in Normandy and ended up as Archbishop of Canterbury.

His career is quite striking and has some relevance to the evolution of the issue. Lanfranc was an extremely successful teacher of canon

law, making a great deal of money doing that. He was, however, a cleric and a very serious Christian cleric indeed. He was teaching at the Cathedral School of Avranches in western Normandy, just across the bay from the great monastery of Mont Saint-Michel. It was a very distinguished school, and pupils flocked to Lanfranc from all over Western Europe to the extent that he got tired of it. He was embarrassed by all the money he was making and he went off to be a hermit. He picked as a community to which he could attach himself as a hermit the new monastery of Bec in central Normandy, between what is traditionally called Upper Normandy and Lower Normandy. It had been founded in 1042 by a knight who left the world, and shortly after he had established his hermitage and some other people had come to join him, Lanfranc arrived. The abbot said to Lanfranc: you must lead our school. Lanfranc hadn't wanted to do that, but he recognized that he had a duty to spread learning. Although his own training had been in the field of law, Lanfranc became famous as a teacher of logic, and people soon came to Bec to study logic rather than law from this distinguished figure.

Lanfranc's outstanding pupil was Anselm, born in 1033 and dying in 1109 — another north Italian who traveled to France to study logic. He seems to have gone to school at Pavia in Italy, then to eastern central France to study logic, and then made his way to Avranches because he heard that Lanfranc was there. When Lanfranc left Avranches, Anselm followed him after a while to the Abbey of Bec. When Lanfranc left the directorship of the school of Bec to become abbot of a local Norman monastery, Anselm took over as head of the school, then became abbot of Bec, and finally Archbishop of Canterbury. In other words, he followed his master Lanfranc in all of his positions in life. He also followed him in his logical teaching and took the realist school a great deal further than anyone else had.

Anselm developed the remarkable argument of the ontological proof of the existence of God — the argument that once you properly define God, once you understand what the name God means, then if you really explore this definition of which you are fully cognizant, you have demonstrated to yourself that God exists. I won't go into that proof right now. It's had its own remarkable kind of history. But it's an example of the value of realist thinking and logic to Christian theology. Never before had there been a proof quite like that. Later proofs of the existence of God by Thomas Aquinas, for example, have proven not to be nearly as compelling as Anselm's ontological argument, which is taught today with fascination by numerous professors of philosophy in American universities — themselves agnostic or irreligious — who nevertheless maintain that you cannot disprove Anselm's ontological argument. So realism was a powerful ally of Christian theology.

The Nominalist Antithesis

Nominalist thinkers maintained, on the contrary, that names are nomina — which gives its name to their school. Names have little or no reality content. Some names may convey adequate information about the things they commonly designate, but that connection was at best accidental and never reliable. Instead, names are really conventional signs with little relationship to the things they designate. Some nominalists went so far as to say that names were merely eruptions of sound. Flatus voces was their favorite expression — and flatus voces is quite a remarkable term. When one gropes for a polite way of translating it, it refers to a kind of vocal flatulence. When one of the great nominalists proposed this particular formula, he knew very well that he was appealing to a kind of earthy rejection of the whole position he was attacking. According to the nominalist, anything could be called by any name — even by names

conventionally supposed to designate the opposite — without affecting the reality of the thing in question.

An important early nominalist was a man named Berengar of Tours, a cleric, maybe born about 1000, who died about 1088. Berengar got into a famous argument with Lanfranc about what happened when a priest consecrated bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ — that is, the central Christian mystery of the Eucharist. In the course of the dispute, Lanfranc accused Berengar of wishing to understand everything by reason, rejecting thereby sacred authority.

It's important to recognize that Berengar was not denying the transformation of the ordinary bread and wine into the mystical body and blood of Christ. He was entirely agreeing that what the priest said made it happen. But he questioned how what the priest said could possibly do that. The formula which was very dear to realist explainers of sacramental theology was this: the priest is supposed to say, "This is my body" — the priest acting as Christ, not as priest. The phrase is hoc est corpus meum. This hoc is my corpus.

Now, here we're talking about a name which is not even a noun — it's a pronoun, the word hoc, but it stands for a noun, for this piece of bread. What realists asserted was that once God heard the priest, acting in his stead, say hoc — this — he understood that he was referring to a piece of bread. And when the priest went on to say, "This is my body," then this — the bread — became the body. An interesting kind of grammatical extension of realism, and a vulnerable one, as Berengar recognized. He went to work upon it. He was pretty much rejected, although he continued to have a successful career within the church. He was never accused of heresy, but he was seen as a dangerous man proposing a dangerous doctrine with potentially serious consequences for the stability of Christian belief.

The next generation of nominalism was very well represented by one Roscelin of Compiègne, born in 1050 and dying in 1125, who said that one could describe the Christian Trinity as consisting of three gods rather than of three persons in one God, as the ancient formula of the Council of Nicaea had defined the doctrine of the Trinity. It didn't really matter what you said, since the words God and person were merely flatus voces, without any real meaning.

Anselm, Lanfranc's pupil, accused Roscelin of tritheism, a heretical doctrine which argued that God was actually three gods. But a church council in 1092 understood Roscelin's argument well enough to clear him of the charge. And once he was cleared of the charge of heresy, he was immediately offered appointment to cathedral chapters all throughout Europe, all the way from England to the German Empire. He accepted lots of them and would visit these chapters from time to time. He settled down in the city of Loches in Anjou, where he taught many people, including Peter Abelard.

Again, with both Berengar and Roscelin, it's very important to understand that we have here an interesting kind of discussion with potential consequences of a heretical character. Neither Roscelin nor Berengar denied the belief in the Eucharist, the belief in the Trinity — two of the most central and incomprehensible mysteries of formal Christian theology. Nor did they reject the formulae by which these things were explained. Berengar did not reject the formula hoc est corpus meum, nor did Lanfranc reject the formula of the Council of Nicaea. Instead, what both Berengar and Rosecelin tackled was what these formulae meant. How could the priest, saying hoc est corpus meum, achieve what the priest achieved — which he believed that he did achieve by saying that phrase? How can we understand the Trinity, this coexistence of three persons in one God, since neither the term person nor the term God conveys very much in the way of useful logical thought?

So we have here a dispute which was impossible in early centuries of medieval thought — a dispute which required a certain level of education in which people were willing to debate issues in these strictly, coldly logical terms.

Peter Abelard and the Conceptualist Synthesis

The nominalist-realist debate died down after 1125, thanks to the theory of conceptualism developed by Peter Abelard, born in 1079 and dying in 1143. Abelard's a fascinating man. He was born in Brittany, the son of a noble family distantly related to the Duke of Brittany. Although he was the eldest son, he resigned his primogeniture right to inheriting his father's fief and went off to study philosophy, exchanging, as he said, the arms of Mars for the arms of Minerva, the goddess of wisdom.

He studied with Roscelin at Loches, and then he went on to Paris to study with a pupil of Anselm's. And defeating both of his teachers in debate within the classroom — reducing them to humiliation, according to his own account of these things — he then moved on to develop his own synthetic doctrine of conceptualism.

William of Champeaux was the teacher in the Paris Cathedral School, a student of Anselm of Bec and a very loyal realist disciple of his. Abelard disagreed with him in public debate, and according to Abelard, this caused William to retire from the Cathedral School of Paris and go off to found a monastery and eventually become a bishop, since he was no longer capable of upholding his logical position.

Abelard said that there were three key questions in this dispute — three key questions which, if properly answered, would cut through to the heart of the matter. First: whether names — and for that matter species and genera — exist intramentally or extramentally as

well. That is, do they exist only in the mind, intramentally, or outside the mind as well? Second: if they exist in reality, extramentally, are they material or immaterial? And third: if they are real, and whether they are material or immaterial, are they separate from things or involved in them?

For Abelard, the names we give to species such as man, and genera such as animal, were the key names in the issue. Man is a rational species of the genus animal. And individual men were given names like Plato and Aristotle. And people would ask questions like: if Socrates is in Athens and Plato is in Rome and Aristotle is in Paris, then where is man, where is humanity? If the individuals are in different places, where does the species reside? This was a favorite question of realists and nominalists alike, and Abelard tackled it in his turn.

Abelard, before giving his solution, asked three new questions. First of all: what is there in things which enables us to give them common names? Because we certainly do do that. If in fact there are no such things as universals, then what do common names designate? Abelard is starting to talk linguistics — semantics, if you want — as well as logic in a narrow sense. And thirdly, Abelard's third question: if particular things should cease to exist, would their names still designate the content or notion to us? In other words, he asked: if all the roses were to die, what would the name rose mean?

Now, this is typical, I think, of Abelard's remarkable genius, his remarkable capacity for finding the perfect instance, the perfect formulation of his thought. Think of roses. Roses are red, pink, white — just simply to begin. Roses can be very simple, four petals turned out in the wild, or a variety of very complicated hybrid roses. Roses are a wonderfully diverse kind of species with a great range of subspecies as well as individuals. So it's much more striking and much more intelligent for Abelard to ask this question about roses.

This question — if all the roses were to die, what then would the name rose mean — lets us know that Shakespeare, or at any rate Romeo, was a nominalist. Or rather, Juliet was a nominalist. "By Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo?" — by any other name it would be the same to me, but because of your name we cannot get together. A good example of the folly of realism and the romantic wisdom of nominalist thought, which is pretty much the way Shakespeare's 16th century tended to think about these things.

What Abelard concluded was that logically defined names are adequate concepts — adequate to the thing of which they serve as a sign, adequate to the demands of systematic logical consistency. Names are not different from things in an absolute, radical way. They are just differently conceived aspects of things, the mental aspect of things if you wish, and intramental as well. As Abelard put it, the crucial distinction is non aliud sed aliter — the name is not something else, it is somehow differently existing.

Abelard's conceptualism was actually quite close to Aristotle's moderate realism, of which Abelard was unaware. His conceptualism would be accepted by Thomas Aquinas and still has its defenders today.

Now, I think it's useful to ask how Abelard was able to reach the level of Aristotelian speculation on this matter without knowing Aristotle's full logical work — knowing only the Isagoge of Porphyry, which, as we mentioned, simply poses the question without offering any kind of resolution. And this is, I think, a tremendous indication of the sophistication of Western thought in medieval Europe even before its classical sources were fully known to it. The fact that someone like Abelard could deal with a logical issue knowing that the master of logic was Aristotle, knowing that there were many, many works of Aristotle — they knew the titles of these books, which they did not have copies of — and yet could go ahead instead of simply waiting

to get a copy of the relevant book, is a sign of the independence as well as the sophistication of Western thought at that time.

Abelard was himself immensely bumptious. He went about from teacher to teacher almost like a knight going about from tournament to tournament, looking first of all for someone from whom he could learn, but with whom he could then fight and overthrow in fair combat. He liked to present things that way. Although he had traded the arms of Mars for the arms of Minerva, he maintained the mentality of a young gentleman of a highly combative feudal aristocracy which had trained him and obviously conditioned him.

He also got into serious trouble with the authorities of the church. His work on the Trinity — his effort to explain the Trinity better than either Anselm or Roscelin had been able to do — was condemned by two church councils, although now, as we read it, we find it very difficult to figure out what the problem was. Abelard's effort to explain such profound and central mysteries as the Trinity deeply shocked the respectable leaders of church opinion in his time. For example, Bernard of Clairvaux — who is kind of the public voice of his moment, a figure who had a kind of credibility in the world of serious letters that would later be enjoyed by Erasmus and then in the 18th century by Voltaire — Bernard of Clairvaux, who belongs to the old rabbinical Augustinian tradition of thought about sacred topics, was horrified by what Abelard was doing, even more than by what Abelard was saying.

What Abelard was basically doing was using logic — Aristotelian-style logic — to explain Christian doctrine. For people like Bernard, this raised the old question, the old specter of Athens taking over Jerusalem. One of the early fathers of the church had asked, what has Athens to do with Jerusalem? And one of the great efforts of Christian thinking has been to combine the tradition of Greek rationality with the revelation of the Hebrews. And that is a very

unstable blend, to be sure, and from time to time it threatens to explode and to disappear. In Bernard's mind, Abelard was bringing the mixture to a very dangerous level of heat in the laboratory of logical speculation, and his efforts should be stopped.

But even Bernard was not able to convince the fathers of the 12th century French church that Abelard's teaching was heretical. Abelard's whole approach was characterized as heretical, but the teaching survived. It was accepted by standard scholastic theologians, by Thomas Aquinas, and incorporated into Thomas' own logical works. That's interesting, because Thomas was a deep Aristotelian. Thomas might perfectly well have dismissed what Abelard had tried to establish and simply gone straight back to Aristotle, since Abelard's conceptualism and Aristotle's moderate realism were very close. Why didn't he do that? He didn't do it because Abelard's formulation of the conceptualist solution to the problem of universals was so elegant, so usefully stated, that Thomas found it an important thing to maintain. This was true, actually, with lots of Abelard's doctrines — Abelard's ethics, which were also like the ethics of the Platonists, the Aristotelians, and indeed the New Testament, and which were very different from the kind of legalistic ethics of the previous 500 years of medieval thought.

The Revival of Nominalism

However, the conceptualist solution to the problem of universals adopted by Aquinas and the other scholastics did not last. Nominalism revived in the 14th century — indeed in the late 13th century — and this revival began in England.

One of the most important of the early nominalists is a Franciscan scholastic named Duns Scotus, who was a professor in the English universities and a deeply devout Franciscan figure, certainly not

trying to challenge any statement of Christian doctrine. The most flamboyant supporter of nominalism in the 14th century was another Briton — an Englishman named William of Ockham, born in the south of England in Surrey probably about the year 1290, and who died in either 1349 or 1350 as a victim of the Black Death, the terrible bubonic plague which had come out of India and was ravaging European cities and communities — particularly clusters of clerics gathered together — with terrific effectiveness.

Now, William of Ockham was a very radical man. He liked radical stances. He was a radical Franciscan friar who got condemned as a heretic by the papacy and immediately, therefore, supported by the Holy Roman Emperor — and who had to escape from papal territory with the aid of an imperial agent. A very exciting kind of story, almost like modern spy narratives.

What William of Ockham got condemned by the papacy for was his attack upon church property — not anything nominalist or realist or theological or philosophical in the proper sense. On the other hand, he did use many of his nominalist arguments to argue that the connection between the text of the Bible and present conditions was invalid. The papacy was trying to claim that Christ was himself the CEO of a land-owning corporation, and Peter, as his successor, was simply continuing the same thing, with certain texts adduced from the New Testament. Ockham made wild fun of these texts — not on the grounds of historical linguistics, but on the grounds of nominalist analysis of terms. And this was delicious to people who were opposed to church property, like most secular rulers who would like to own a good deal of the property the church then had. So the Emperor Louis of Bavaria supported Ockham in his tiff with the Pope.

In time, this kind of nominalism led to far more serious consequences. Widely taught in the faculties of letters at Oxford and Cambridge and then on the continent, it led to the conviction that no

theological truth can be demonstrated by reason. Faith alone is adequate to establishing religious certitude. And right there you have, of course, the fundamental theological statement of Martin Luther, who — like most university intellectuals of his generation — was a nominalist. And that nominalism strongly affected his theology in the later history of Western Christianity.

The Legacy

Galileo, otherwise a radical reconceiver of the universe, seems surprisingly enough to have been a realist in philosophical matters. The great 17th and 18th century thinkers John Locke and Immanuel Kant were conceptualists — although I don't think they would have described themselves that way; more probably they would have said that Aristotle's moderate realism convinced them. And later on, David Hume, the great 18th century logician, George Berkeley, and Quine have certainly been nominalists in our own day.

So this great issue lives on, quaint and obscure as its medieval discussion sometimes appears to us.

Lecture 22: Mysticism and Meister Eckhart

Professor Philip Carey

The Problem of Defining Mysticism

Now we're going to talk about something that no one really agrees about. The concept of mysticism, which is our topic in this lecture, is one of the most ill-defined and confusing concepts in the whole study of religion — which of course is why it's so interesting. Or maybe it's confusing because it's interesting. But at any rate, it's something that every scholar has something different to say about. Everyone has a different way of classifying the various kinds of mysticism, and in some classifications one person's mysticism doesn't count as mysticism at all, and so on.

So I'd like to lead you into my particular way of dealing with mysticism by zeroing in on what mysticism meant in the Western Christian medieval tradition, because there was a coherent tradition of mystical writing and thinking in the Middle Ages. I'd like to start by classifying the various strands of mysticism in that period, and then by tracing the original meaning of the word mystical, which got into the Western Christian tradition and makes its way through the medieval tradition. And then finally I'd like to look at the end of the Middle Ages, in the 14th century, when the whole mystical tradition reached a certain crisis point because of the great figure of Meister Eckhart, who is in many ways the greatest mystic of them all.

Four Strands of Mysticism

Let's start with classifications — or strands, or types of mysticism. I'll call them strands because they can interweave with one another; one thinker could have various strands of mystical experience. Let me

label these four strands: the visionary strand, the intellectual strand, the unitive strand, and the affective strand — the strand of emotional mysticism.

Start with the visionary strand. By that I refer to people who have visions. For instance, Julian of Norwich, a 14th century woman who had a vision of Christ on the cross. It seemed like she saw him right in front of her, and she describes in her book the nuances of color on his face as he slowly dried up through thirst. She describes a changing of color. It's very vivid, very visual. This is not the vision of the mind's eye. This is a bodily vision. That's what I mean by visionary mysticism. Many people wouldn't call this mysticism at all — they would just call it visionary experience.

The second strand is intellectual mysticism. This would be the sort of thing that you see in Augustine when he talks about glimpsing the eternal light shining above the eye of his mind — all that material about intellectual vision we've been discussing. Again, this need not be classified as mysticism at all, but some people classify it as such.

And then there's unitive mysticism. For many people, including myself, this is really the heart of mysticism. What we mainly want to talk about when we talk about mysticism is the unitive experience — the experience of union between the soul and God, or at least the description of union between the soul and God. You don't have to actually believe that the mystics did unify their souls with God, but you have to deal with the fact that they wrote about it. One way or another, there's a tradition of writing about this experience, however you think about the experience itself. So there's this tradition of writing about union between self and God, or soul and God, which has its greatest theorist, in my view, in Plotinus, but which becomes a key theme in Christian mysticism in the Middle Ages.

And then finally there's affective mysticism — the mysticism of love, as it's often called. The great representative here is Bernard of Clairvaux, or Saint Bernard, who is a 12th century monk who speaks of the Word of God entering the soul the way a bridegroom enters the bedchamber of his bride. There's a spiritual marriage and they become one spirit. "One spirit" comes from Paul, but spiritual marriage is a key notion in this affective mysticism.

As I say, these strands can be combined, and that's what we'll see in the medieval tradition.

Classical Medieval Mysticism

When we look at the classic medieval mystical tradition — and I'll call it a classical tradition because there's a whole group of different thinkers who fit within a broad classification here — the classic mysticism of the Middle Ages is not a visionary mysticism. Visionaries don't need an intellectual tradition, by and large. They don't need a high education. The people who are part of the classic mystical tradition tend to be educated men. The visionaries might be uneducated and they might be women — unlettered women like Julian of Norwich — who don't need to be priests or educated people in order to have visions of Christ. But the more educated and more intellectual sorts, all male in the Middle Ages, will tend to shy away from the visionary experience because, after all, it is seeing with the eye of the body. And they're interested in something more spiritual — more seeing with the eye of the mind — an experience that goes beyond anything that you could touch with your senses.

So in this classical medieval tradition of mysticism, you have a series of representative figures. One I'd like to mention first is Richard of Saint Victor in the 12th century — Saint Victor being an abbey in Paris. And then in the 13th century there's Saint Bonaventure, who

lives at the same time as Aquinas. He's more of an Augustinian, whereas Aquinas is more of an Aristotelian. Both of them combine strands of affective, intellectual, and unitive mysticism, but they don't approve of visionary experience. They want to ascend beyond the vision of the body's eye and toward something more like intellectual vision — but then beyond that.

What they want to do is first of all combine the affective and the intellectual strands, the way Augustine did. Augustine already combined these two because he wanted to get to this beatific vision of God, and it was love that drove him in that direction. So the love is the affective sort of mysticism, the vision is the intellectual mysticism. That was already combined by Augustine and was already part of the medieval heritage in the 12th century, which is when the great medieval classic mystics began their work.

In Bonaventure and Richard of Saint Victor, the third strand comes in. In addition to the affective and intellectual strands, there's the unitive strand. They're interested in a union with God — a union between God and the soul — which goes beyond intellectual vision. Now, that's going to be tricky, because they don't want to follow Plotinus in making the soul at its deepest point identical with God, because that would make the soul divine. So they have to have language for a union with God that goes beyond intellectual vision, but in which the soul in some way goes beyond itself. The soul is not just coming home to its own true being; it's going beyond its natural borders. One piece of language for that is that the soul passes over. There's a transitus — a passing over into God. This is language that comes from the story of the Passover in Exodus. The soul passes over into God, but this passing over is ecstatic.

This becomes a piece of technical terminology in medieval mysticism. Ecstasy in Greek means to stand outside oneself. So the soul goes outside of itself — it stands outside of itself to pass over

into God, who is other than the self. That's the crucial notion. So ecstasy means a passing over into God where the soul goes beyond its own borders, as it were. It doesn't mean trance experience the way we might use the word now. This is a technical terminology for a stage of consciousness which goes beyond a simple trance experience. It has to be defined in terms of this contrast between intellectual vision and a union with God that goes beyond intellectual vision.

Another piece of language they'll use, which becomes increasingly important in the mystical tradition, is talking about going into the darkness that is above the light — a superluminous darkness, a darkness above the light. This is language that they get from a very important early Christian writer that scholars call Pseudo-Dionysius. Writing in the sixth century, he produces a text called The Mystical Theology, which contains this language about ecstasy and about the darkness above the light, the superluminous darkness.

Pseudo-Dionysius

We need to turn now to this Pseudo-Dionysius, a peculiar figure. He's called Pseudo-Dionysius because he wrote under the pseudonym of Dionysius, identifying himself with a New Testament character named Dionysius the Areopagite, who was one of Saint Paul's first converts in Athens when Paul preached in that city. But in fact he wasn't a first century convert of Paul. He was a sixth century Eastern Orthodox writer, probably in Syria, writing in Greek from the Eastern Christian perspective. His pseudonym was, however, taken seriously by most medieval writers. Most medieval writers thought of him as Paul's convert, which gave him a great deal of authority. Some medieval writers were suspicious about the pseudonym, but for all medieval writers in the West he was an authoritative teacher of the Christian

faith — not as authoritative as Augustine, but someone you wanted to agree with, because he was telling you about the structure of the relationship of God and the soul.

So he's one of the influences of the Eastern Christian tradition on the Western Christian tradition. In the 12th century, there weren't a lot of Eastern Christian writings that Western writers knew about. They mostly read Augustine, but they also read this one unique Christian writer from the East named Dionysius. And thus an Eastern form of Christian Neoplatonism got into the Western tradition, because Dionysius is a Neoplatonist — a Christian Neoplatonist, just like Augustine, but a very different kind of Neoplatonist from Augustine. The attempt of medieval writers to combine Pseudo-Dionysius and Augustine leads to some of the most creative developments in medieval thought.

One last note about his name: the West called him Denis — D-E-N-Y-S usually — from which we get our name Dennis, shortened from Dionysius. I'll call him Denis because the writers I like to read call him Denis. None of the medievals called him Pseudo-Dionysius; that's a modern description.

The Term "Mystical" and Denis' Mystical Theology

Denis is the figure who gives us the notion of the mystical, and so we need to talk about that term. The term mystic comes from a Greek term mysterion, or mystery. The original meaning is simply a secret. But it became attached to certain special religious practices, especially the practices of mystery cults. An example of a mystery cult would be the Masons: you get initiated into a secret fraternity and there's all sorts of secret knowledge that you're not given until you're initiated. That's precisely what a mysterion originally meant in Greek — it's a secret that you're told when you join the group.

As a result, baptism came to be called a mystery in the early Christian tradition because there were certain things that converts to Christianity were not told until they were ready to be baptized. For instance, they were not taught the creed in the first centuries of Christian history — they weren't taught the creed until they were ready to be baptized. So baptism became a mystery in precisely that ancient Greek sense: it's an initiation rite and a secret knowledge that you don't get until you're baptized.

In the New Testament, the term mystery does appear in several places, and it means simply the plan of God to save the world through Christ, which is hidden until Christ comes. So the word mystery is not very specific in the New Testament. But in the early Christian tradition, it gets this very technical, specific meaning of baptism, and therefore of sacrament. The word sacrament is actually a Latin term, sacramentum, which translates this word mystery. And to this day, the Eastern Orthodox call the sacraments mysteries. In other words, the Latin term for the sacraments is sacramentum; the Greek Orthodox term for them is mysterion or mysteria. So this word mystery has a rich, rich history. And then it gets into the title of Denis' most important writing, called The Mystical Theology.

The title probably means something not much more than discourse about the secrets of God — a theology about the most secret things of God. And when the term mystic or mystical appears in later writings in the Middle Ages, it's almost always a reference to Denis. Very often it appears in the phrase mystical theology, and it's clearly meant as a reference to that text.

So we need to say a little about that text. The Mystical Theology by Denis is about the secrets of God, and therefore one of its key concepts is the incomprehensibility of God — which, remember, was a key concept in Plotinus. For Plotinus, the One, which is his version of God, is incomprehensible — above all understanding, above all

intellectual light, and therefore incomprehensible. So for Plotinus, you could say that God dwells in a superluminous darkness, a darkness above the light.

Denis will pick up that language, as well as the language of God being super-essential — above being, above essence. He loves this word super-essential. However, unlike Plotinus, Denis does not have this project of uniting oneself with the One. His question in The Mystical Theology is: how do you talk about an incomprehensible God? So instead of a mystical project of mystical union, as in Plotinus, for Denis the question is, how do you describe an incomprehensible God? How do you find language for it?

He proposed what's been called the via negativa — the negative way of describing God, by saying what God is not. God is not being, because God is above being. God is not light, because he's in the darkness above light. God is not all sorts of things. That's the via negativa, and it became very important in classical medieval thought.

But in the classic mystical tradition, what ended up happening is that this strand of mystical theology in Denis is combined with the intellectual mysticism and affective mysticism of Augustine. So there's this project in the classical mystical tradition in the Middle Ages of combining talk about the incomprehensible one with a project of ascending. The concern with talking about the incomprehensible one is Denis' concern. The concern with ascending is Augustinian — remember, Augustine turned inward and looked upward. So there's an ascent of the soul to the One, but the One nonetheless remains above all comprehension and understanding. Here we've got two strands of Christian Neoplatonism — Western Christian Neoplatonism with Augustine, Eastern Christian Neoplatonism with Denis — combining to form the nerve, the heart, the spine of classical mystical thought in the Middle Ages.

What happens, though, is that these classic mystics like Richard of Saint Victor and Bonaventure are not happy stopping where Augustine wants to stop. For Augustine, beatific vision, intellectual vision — that's what it's all about; there's no higher level. Whereas for Richard of Saint Victor and Bonaventure, there is a higher level, and they want to describe it as something like a union.

One thing that goes on in the Middle Ages is this interesting adjustment between Augustine and Denis about what it means to see God. For Augustine, our soul is like an eye that sees the sun — that Platonic sun — and once it's strengthened, once it overcomes its own sin and is purified, it's ready to gaze at that sun forever. For Denis, God is also like a sun, but we can never get used to it. We can never strengthen the eyes of our mind so much as to actually gaze at that sun. It's too bright. We try to gaze at it, and there's this superabundance of light, and that's the darkness above the light. Think of how your eyes will be darkened by gazing at the sun — not because you're gazing into darkness and shadow, but because you're gazing into too much light, superabundant light. So for Denis, we can't gaze at the sun and see it. We'll gaze at it, but we'll gaze into a darkness — a darkness above the light, a darkness of too much light for us.

So for these 12th century mystics, the last step of mystical ascent is not vision. It's not the soul looking above itself at the source of divine light, but rather this Dionysian ecstasy — the soul going beyond itself, outside itself, passing into a darkness that is above the light. That is the classic mystical tradition of the 12th and 13th centuries.

Meister Eckhart

That tradition goes into the 14th century, and then there's a new development, because of a great genius in mystical thought: Meister Eckhart. Meister Eckhart is a Dominican priest — that is, he's from the same order of preachers as Thomas Aquinas, but a century later. Like Thomas Aquinas, he is a scholastic theologian who writes biblical commentaries in Latin and knows all about the scholastic theology of the previous century.

He's called Meister because that's Old High German for master, and master means teacher. So Meister Eckhart means the teacher Eckhart. He probably gets that name because he was a popular preacher in addition to being a scholastic theologian. He would preach in German — he also preached in Latin, but the memorable sermons are mainly in German. His sermons in Old High German are actually one of the great landmarks of early German literature.

He would speak in a new way — a way that broke new paths for medieval mysticism. He starts in many places, but here is one way to start with Meister Eckhart: he starts with the notion of the birth of the Son of God in the soul.

Now, the birth of the Son of God goes back to Orthodox Christian Trinitarian theology. The idea is that long before Christ was incarnate, he was the eternal Word of God, the second person of the Trinity. So from all eternity there is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and the Son is begotten by the Father before any created thing. So before there was Jesus the man, before there was any creation, heaven or earth, the Son of God was eternally begotten of the Father. Those of you who say the creed in church will recognize that phrase. One way of describing this — one way of translating it, in fact — is to say that the Father gives birth to the Son. That would all be standard Orthodox Christian language ever since the Nicene Creed in the

fourth century. And there has been a tradition in Christian thought of the birth of the Son of God in the soul.

Eckhart got very interested in that notion and used it a great deal. He suggests that the eternal begetting of the Son happens at all times and all places, and above all in the soul. We can in some way experience or be one with this eternal begetting of the Son of God in our own soul.

How is that possible? Here is the key suggestion in Eckhart: it's possible for us to experience the birth of the Son of God in the soul because, in its ultimate depths, the soul is no different from the ultimate depths of God. He has language for this. He talks about the ground of the soul — der Grund, in German, der Seele — the ground or bottom or deepest side of the soul, which he says is identical with the Grund, the ground, the deepest side of God. So at our bottom level, at our bottom line, we are in some way coinciding with God, and therefore what happens in the Trinity in all eternity happens in us, in our souls.

I'll suggest that what's going on in Eckhart can be interpreted as a new form of Christian Neoplatonism — not Augustinian, not Dionysian, and not a combination of the two either. My guess is that Eckhart had read some Plotinus. Some of Plotinus' writings had actually gotten into circulation in the Middle Ages under the title The Theology of Aristotle, and it would have been perfectly respectable to read The Theology of Aristotle. I expect that Eckhart was very intrigued by the Plotinian notion of the deep inner unity of the soul and God, or the soul and the One — the notion that at our highest part we are always identical with the One.

Likewise, Eckhart takes this metaphor of height and prefers the metaphor of depth. At our deepest part, we are always in some sense one with the deepest part of God. In our depths — the depths of the

soul — we are one with the depth of God. The ground of the soul is one with the ground of God.

So my guess is that Eckhart is introducing into the late medieval tradition of mysticism a rediscovered version of Plotinian mysticism.

The Uncreated Spark and the Question of Heresy

Another way of identifying what's new about Eckhart is this key concept he has of the uncreated spark. If the ground of our soul is somehow identical with the ground of God, then there's a part of us which was never created — there's some aspect of our being which was never created. And that's a really bold notion for a Christian thinker to suggest, because in classic Christian orthodoxy there's this fundamental distinction between God the creator and everything that God created — the creature-creator distinction. Everything that exists, for classic Christian orthodoxy like Augustine or Denis, is either God the creator or the things that God created. There is nothing else but those two sorts of things.

God can be called uncreated in the sense that nothing ever created God. There's the old child's question: if God created everything, what created God? The traditional Christian answer is simply that nothing created God. God is uncreated. God has always been. Nothing created God — not even God created God — because God is eternal.

Now notice what Eckhart is saying: he's saying there's an aspect of ourselves which is uncreated, just like God. There's an aspect of ourselves which is not a created thing. There's an aspect of our souls which is in the deepest sense divine. That's the sort of thing that Augustine had avoided saying, despite his enthusiasm for Plotinus, whereas Eckhart is willing to go further with Plotinus than Augustine was.

And thus, unlike the classic mystics of the 12th and 13th centuries, Eckhart isn't just talking about a kind of union between God and the soul. He's not just talking about a spiritual marriage where there's the bride and the bridegroom and they come together but still remain two distinct persons or two distinct things in union. For Eckhart there's a kind of identity between the deepest part of the soul and the deepest part of God. They don't come to one another as other — the way bridegroom and bride do. It's the soul coming home to its deepest self, a homecoming: finding, ah, this is where I really am — in God.

As a result, Eckhart was tried for heresy, because in his language he was violating that crucial distinction between creature and creator. And there's a big controversy to this day about whether Eckhart was really a heretic. My own view is that you can defend Eckhart from the charges of heresy and say he really meant the same thing that Orthodox Christians meant — but that takes all the interest out of Eckhart. The interesting Eckhart, the bold and dangerous Eckhart, is precisely the one who risked heresy. And he probably was a heretic as defined by Orthodox standards. But that's very controversial, and of course nowadays people aren't troubled to be called heretics.

One way of putting this is: if your main interest in life is fidelity to Christian orthodoxy, then Eckhart is not going to be your favorite thinker. But if one of your main interests in life is what might tie the deepest aspects of Christianity to other religions, then Eckhart might be just the Christian you want to study — because of that similarity between Eckhart's thought and Plotinus' thought, and as I suggested when I lectured about Plotinus, between Plotinus and Hinduism. That notion that at some deep level of inner unity, if we find that level, what we've found is God. Augustine can't go that far. When he gets to the deepest level of the soul, he's still just himself, and God is above him. Whereas for Eckhart, when you get to that deep level,

you've found God. And that seems to be true for Hinduism — it's certainly true for Plotinus.

After Eckhart: Later Medieval Mysticism

That ended up being a road that medieval mysticism did not take, because it was leading into heresy. And so Eckhart remains the great representative of that daring, bold attempt to push the envelope — or perhaps to break it. After the 14th century, mystical movements take a different direction. Some end up in the direction of visionary mysticism, like with Julian of Norwich. Others end up emphasizing affective mysticism, emphasizing a love that goes beyond understanding — which is very modern. Most of us would think that love can take us further than intellect can. Ask any modern person which understands things more deeply, love or intellect, and almost any modern will pick love. That became a very popular choice in 14th century medieval mysticism as well — love gets us closer to God than mere intellect.

Another theme of 14th century mysticism, very prominent in Eckhart but also in others, is the notion of simplifying the soul — of purifying it of its involvement not just with the physical world, which is of course a standard theme of Christian thinking since Augustine, but also purifying it of intellectual ideas, including even Platonic forms, because Eckhart wants to get beyond that point. So there's this notion of simplifying the soul, purging it, making it, in Eckhart's terms, bare and empty. But that's a direction not everyone wanted to follow him in.

So the more standard Christian mysticism of the 14th century ended up focusing on the image of darkness. If your vision is full of a multitude of different things, then you're distracted by all this multiplicity, and you want something simpler and truer than all that

multiplicity. So you want a darkness, not a light. But of course that keys in with the language from Denis of the darkness above the light. And so a lot of these 14th century writers love that image from Denis of the darkness above the light — a dark night of the soul, they'll call it.

That kind of language is already present in a 14th century guide to spiritual direction called The Cloud of Unknowing, which talks about entering the dark night above the light. It then becomes the center of a deep mystical theology in the 16th century in Spain with Saint John of the Cross, who writes a whole book on the dark night of the soul — this purification and simplification of the soul that happens when you lose everything.

Saint John of the Cross was also a spiritual director — he was spiritual director for Saint Teresa of Ávila. He was probably thinking of that time in the life of a monk or a meditative Christian when your whole life is devoted to prayer and all of a sudden you have a dry spell. All of a sudden your prayers are cold and dead, and you have no emotion at all. Your whole life is devoted to prayer, and your prayers are empty and cold. You are in the dark night of the soul when nothing seems to matter. And that's when your soul is really formed in the love of God — when you seem farthest from God, far away from any sort of consolation and love, but you keep praying in this dark night. Your soul is shaped and deepened in the love of God.

So you can see how this imagery of the darkness above the light is very useful for Christian thinkers in a whole range of different ways. A key image like the darkness above the light can mean several different things depending on who you ask and when — which is one of the reasons why, as I said at the beginning, mysticism can mean a lot of different things to a lot of different people.

Lecture 23: Luther, Law, and Gospel

Professor Philip Carey

Introduction: Luther and the Beginning of the Modern Religious World

Now we jump to the 16th century — to what is in many ways the beginning of the modern world, especially the beginning of the modern religious world, with the foundation of Protestantism and the great founding figure of the Protestant Reformation: Martin Luther. He started out as a monk, one of those contemplatives devoting his life to prayer. He ended up abandoning the monastic orders, getting married, and starting a new religious movement. He didn't mean to do any of those things at the beginning.

What he meant to do, really, was to think more carefully about Paul's doctrine of justification by faith. And he insisted that it should be properly interpreted by saying that justification is by faith alone. That's his great principle: faith alone. That's at the heart of his thought. If the Pope could have adjusted to that, then Luther and the Pope could have gotten along. But they didn't. So we'll try to talk about, first, what Martin Luther was distinctively thinking about, and second, why it led to the Protestant Reformation and the splitting of the church, and therefore the end of this era of Christendom dominated by one Roman Catholic Church.

Young Luther: The Problem of Earning Grace

Now let's go back to young Luther — Luther the monk, Luther before he becomes famous, Luther before the famous 95 Theses, Luther before he's planning to do anything big like reform the church.

That's too huge a project. Young Luther the monk is simply trying to get himself saved. He's got the problem of trying to earn grace.

Remember how at the end of Augustine's career, he was faced with the question: does grace come before any effort or choice of ours? Or does our decision for faith come first? This becomes a key question throughout Western Christianity. Does grace come first, before any choice or decision or movement of our will? Or do our decisions come first? And a lot of people in the Western Christian tradition want to answer that our decision is what comes first.

Young Luther was part of a form of theology in the 15th century that answered the question in the non-Augustinian way — our decisions come first; we have to do something before grace is given to us. What do we have to do? This 15th century tradition answered: we have to do everything that lies within us. By our own natural powers, without the assistance of grace, said these 15th century theologians, we can love God above all things — just by working at it. And there were various ways of working at it if you were a monk in the 15th or 16th centuries: various forms of penitential practices, fasting and prayer, and all that. And you do all that, and then — the picture goes — you would get grace. So in effect, what you're doing is trying to earn grace.

The mature Luther looks back on that project of earning grace as horrifying — absolutely horrific. He called it the torture of conscience. Yes, that's the phrase. And the label for the project itself is works righteousness. Torture of conscience is the result of works righteousness, if you have a tender conscience like Luther's. He's trying by his own good works to earn grace, and the mature Luther is convinced that grace is a free gift. God doesn't give us grace because we earn it. He gives us grace because he's gracious. And trying to earn grace will only make you miserable and produce torture of conscience. We'll talk about how that works in a moment.

Augustine on Slavish and Filial Obedience

In fact, we can get into how that works for Luther by going back to Augustine again. Here I want to talk about an important treatise of Augustine that was very important in Luther's early thinking. The treatise is called On the Spirit and the Letter, and in it Augustine distinguishes two kinds of obedience to God, which were later called slavish obedience and filial obedience — that is, the obedience of a slave for a master and the obedience of a son or daughter for their parent.

The slave obeys in a different way than a son or daughter does. The slave obeys out of fear. The slave is worried that if I don't obey, I'm going to get punished, so I'll have to do what the master says. That's one way of obeying God, after all — you're afraid that if you do the wrong thing you'll go to hell or something like that, so you just work as hard as you can trying to earn God's favor, hoping that the result will be to your satisfaction. The other sort of obedience is the obedience of someone who actually loves the person they're obeying, the way a daughter loves her father.

That's the kind of obedience that Luther was trying to attain. All good monks try to attain that kind of obedience. But that's impossible without grace, Luther thinks. And yet he's still trying to earn the grace that would give him that kind of obedience.

With that kind of obedience comes what the medieval theologians called contrition. Contrition is a form of hatred, whereas true obedience is a form of love. Contrition is a hatred of sin — a true hatred of sin because it offends God — as opposed to the kind of hatred of sin where you say, oh gee, I wish I hadn't done that, that's going to get me in trouble. That's not contrition. Contrition is when you hate your sin simply because it offends God, simply because God

hates it. So it's like the true hatred of sin that goes with the true love of God — love of God for his own sake, not love of God for the sake of reward; not hatred of sin for the sake of avoiding punishment, but simply because sin is hateful to God.

So what young Luther as a monk is after is a certain kind of purity of heart — a certain kind of pure and disinterested love of God. That's what he's after as a monk. That's what he spends his time and energy on, using these medieval penitential practices we know about: fasting, prayer, and frequent confession.

The Vicious Circle of the Terrified Conscience

But if you're trying to earn grace and you have a tender conscience — a conscience that is constantly aware of your own sinfulness — then the project of earning grace becomes a miserable failure. And that's how young Luther experienced it; that's what the mature Luther was trying to escape.

Think of it this way. Imagine you're trying to earn grace by purifying your love so that you have true filial obedience and true contrition. But in the process of all this fasting and praying, you're also constantly examining your own heart. This is called examination of conscience — the conscience is looking at all your thoughts, every little stray thought, and asking: in this little stray thought, am I truly loving God here? Or, here I am feeling good as I worship, but is that because I'm hoping to go to heaven rather than truly loving God? Imagine yourself asking this kind of question all the time. I feel good when I pray — is that because I'm hoping God will love me as a result? Oh, that would be wicked. I can only feel good if I pray simply because I love God for his own sake.

Imagine being very intensely introspective, very intensely self-critical, asking those kinds of questions. Inevitably, it's going to make you

miserable. It's going to produce a kind of vicious circle, which I think Luther got himself into. Let's try to trace some of this vicious circle.

Here you are, examining your own heart. Perhaps you've just prayed and you feel comforted by your prayer. And you ask yourself: is there any self-interest in that prayer? A hope maybe that I'll go to heaven? That would be wicked. Oh dear — I probably did have some of that self-interested, selfish hope in my heart. And that means clearly I'm not in a state of grace. If I'm not in a state of grace, that means I'm damnable, that means I'm God's enemy and God hates me, and oh no, that means I'm lost. You fall into despair. And then: why would God do this to me? That's so awful. And you end up resenting God for not giving you grace. And that, of course, makes you even more horrified — you're supposed to be loving God, and here you are resenting God. And that makes you even worse. And of course God hates you even more for that, and then you end up hating God for it, because look at what God has let you into.

Here you are trying to earn grace by loving God perfectly, and you end up hating God, fearing God. This is worse than slavish obedience — or at best, it's the obedience of a slave who hates his master and is only trying to please him in order to escape punishment. This is a form of deep, deep hatred of God, and also deep, deep terror.

Luther would later call it the terrified conscience. It's fascinating that he uses this phrase. When he feels or is aware of his own sin — and he'll call it consciousness of sin, the Latin for which is conscientia, which can be translated either as conscience of sin or consciousness of sin — he doesn't call it a guilty conscience. He's aware of his guilt before God, but the feeling it produces in him is not what we call guilt. It's the feeling of terror.

Our guilty consciences nowadays register a sense that we are failures, that we haven't lived up to our own ideals, that we fall short

somehow — I'm not up to snuff, I'm not as good as I should be. Luther wasn't feeling like that. He was feeling terrified. He'd earned the wrath of God. God hated him, and he deserved to be hated. He couldn't deny that God had every right to damn him — and should damn him. Imagine that sort of situation. That's young Luther.

The Indulgences Controversy and the 95 Theses

Now imagine that as you're wrestling with this, you're a young Luther, and in a nearby part of Germany, indulgences are being sold. This is a medieval thing. Indulgences are official letters from the Pope which promise remission of sins — and especially remission of temporal penalty, to use the exact phrase.

What that means is this: if you die in the faith and don't go to hell, but haven't worked off all your sins, you go to purgatory. Purgatory is actually an acceptable place, because if you're in purgatory, you're guaranteed to get to heaven eventually. People in purgatory do not end up in hell — they always end up in heaven, but it may take a while. And while they're in purgatory, they have to be cleansed of their sins, and that requires a certain amount of punishment, a certain amount of working off these sins.

So when you go to confession in the medieval Catholic Church in Luther's time, you're confessing all these sins so that they won't send you to hell, but you still have to make satisfaction for them — to use the technical term. You have to make up for them, purify yourself of them. That takes time, and some of that time will be spent not on earth but in purgatory.

Now, indulgences are there to knock off some of the sentence you have in purgatory. They remit that temporal penalty. They can't remit the eternal penalty of hell — they remit the temporal penalty of purgatory. For a price. That's the key thing. The indulgences were a

way of raising money, and that was quite clear — everyone knew it. But people believed that they would actually get you out of purgatory sooner, and thus pave your way to heaven. And some of the common folk, who didn't know all these subtle theological distinctions I've just run through, basically thought they were buying their way into heaven. They thought: if I can come up with the cash, go over to that neighboring town and buy some of these indulgences, the Pope will send me to heaven.

Now imagine you're Luther, wrestling so seriously with the problem of true contrition, true repentance, true love of God — and here these people are going off to buy indulgences. And you're thinking: these folks are being deceived. They're being sold a bill of goods. And these priests who are selling indulgences and should be helping these people go to heaven — they're sending them to hell. These people are trying to buy their way into heaven, and this is going to buy their way into damnation. Something must be done.

So what Luther does is post 95 theses on the church door. That's probably the most famous thing he ever did, and it doesn't quite mean what people think it means. He wasn't defying the church by posting a protest on the church door. The church door was a bulletin board — it was a big church door of a castle church, a university church, in a university town. Luther was a university professor, a professor of Old Testament at Wittenberg. He went to the bulletin board, which is where you posted academic notices, and tacked up 95 theses for scholarly debate. They were in Latin. They weren't addressed to the ordinary public — they were addressed to other scholars, saying: I want to have a debate about the meaning of indulgences. There's something wrong with the way these indulgences are being sold. Let's get a scholarly debate going about it. He was trying to stir something up among a few scholars at

Wittenberg. He was not trying to change the history of Europe. But he did. He ended up starting the Protestant Church.

And he did it, by the way, on All Hallows' Eve — Halloween — which among German Protestant churches, especially Lutheran churches, is celebrated as Reformation Day. So he posts these 95 theses, and something gets started in a big way. They get translated quickly into German. They become a cause célèbre, a controversy. The Pope gets involved. And eventually there's a split between the churches that think Luther is right and the churches that stick with the Pope.

Law and Gospel

But we'll get back to that in a moment. I want now to follow again the progress of Luther's thought, which is hard to trace because it gets so involved in this controversy called the Reformation. But as far as we can, let's try to follow the natural development of Luther's thought.

Here he is with his terrified conscience. What's he going to do about it? Well, he wants grace. And he's thinking in terms of law versus grace — the Augustinian contrast that comes from Saint Paul. Law means, for Augustine, trying to earn your way to salvation, including trying to earn grace. Grace means receiving salvation and justification as gifts.

Now, Luther ends up putting this contrast in a new context. For Luther, the fundamental mode by which we know things is not seeing but hearing. In contrast to Augustine with his metaphor of intellectual vision, for Luther the way we get to know God is by hearing him. We hear the Word of God, and the Word of God is the crucial, central organizing concept and experience in Luther's theology. God speaks to us. That's how he makes himself known. He speaks to us through Scripture, but he also speaks through

preaching and through the sacraments. In all of these forms, we encounter the Word of God — God speaking to us.

So rather than speaking of law and grace, Luther will speak of law and gospel. These are two forms of the Word of God — two ways in which God speaks to us.

Law is the most familiar. Law is God's commandments, telling us what to do. There are two forms of the law for Luther. The first is the civil use of the law — all the things that God does in order to give society some order and structure, making sure people know they're not supposed to kill each other and so on. But the most important use of the law, Luther calls the evangelical use of the law. That means the gospel use of the law — evangelical simply means gospel. The evangelical use of the law is to terrify you: to drive you into that state of terrified conscience, an awareness of sin, so that you're desperately looking around for grace.

And then comes gospel. Gospel is the gracious word of God which gives you something to hang on to when you're terrified. The gospel is God's promise. As the law is God's commandment telling you what to do, the gospel is God's promise giving you something that you couldn't get yourself. It's God saying: here, I promise you, I will give you forgiveness, my love, my grace. Here it is. Just believe it. Just believe that I tell you this is the truth.

We can state this again in contrast with Augustine. Augustine, talking about grace, prays to God and says — and here's his prayer for grace — "Give what you command, Lord God, and then command whatever you want." If you command me to love you with all my heart, well, give me that love. That's what grace is. Grace gives you the love of God. Luther says not "give what you command and then command whatever you want," but rather: the promise gives what the command requires. The gospel gives what the law requires of us.

So the law terrifies by saying: you must be righteous, you must love God with your whole heart, mind, and strength. And someone like Luther says: I can't. I can't. I see too much hatred of God in my heart. I see too much of a divided heart. I don't know how to love God like that. And then the gospel says: here. Here's how you can learn to love God. I forgive you. I love you. It's God saying these kind and gracious things that comfort us, so that we find it natural to love a God who is giving us these good gifts. So the gospel becomes the place that Luther goes to find grace. It gives us the ability to do all those things that Luther as a young monk found he was unable to do — like love God with all our hearts.

The Word of Absolution

So let's go back to the original situation: Luther trying to find a true love of God. Imagine going to confession. He goes to confession with his spiritual advisor, a man named Staupitz. The story is that he used to wear Staupitz out by spending all day confessing sins to him — every stray thought. Here he is, confessing all of his stray thoughts and asking: how am I going to find grace? And it only gets worse.

Well, at the end of the sacrament of penance, what Staupitz and any priest is supposed to do, if the person is contrite, is to say the word of absolution. And it goes like this: "I absolve you of your sins in the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit." Priests still do this in the confessional to this day.

Now imagine that you're Luther — trying to find grace, always finding that you're inadequate, always finding that your heart is not prepared for it. And then suddenly you hear this and you pay attention to it for the first time: "I absolve you of your sins in the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit." And not only that, but in the habit of obedience, you're used to thinking of the words of the

priest as Christ's own words. Whatever the priest tells you is Christ's words, especially when he speaks in the name of Christ and absolves you of your sins. Wait a minute. That means it is Jesus Christ himself who is saying, "I absolve you of your sins." That means that I don't have a right to believe that I'm a sinner anymore.

I mean, I could look at myself and see sin — but wait a minute. I'm supposed to believe what Jesus tells me, and he's telling me through my friend Staupitz that my sins are forgiven. I don't have a right to hate myself anymore. I don't have a right to be terrified anymore. I don't have a right to keep looking for every little sin in my heart. I have to believe that God wants to forgive my sins.

And all of a sudden the terror drops away. All of a sudden, young Luther, terrified Luther, has something to hang on to — a kind word from the God he was so terrified of. Here is Christ himself telling this terrified young man that his sins are forgiven, that he loves him. It's like a young man being able to believe for the first time in his life that his father loves him because his father is saying so. "Will you please believe me, Martin? I love you." Imagine that being said to you at some time of terrible crisis: "Please believe me. I love you. Will you believe me this time when I say that?" That's what the Word of God — the word of the gospel in particular — does for Luther. And that's why he's so intent on justification by faith alone.

Because justification by faith alone means: don't try to earn grace. Don't try to be so perfect by eliminating every little sin in your heart. Eventually you want to get rid of those sins, but working at it is not going to do it. None of your works does anything. Justification is by faith alone, apart from works. All that you can do is hear this beautiful, comforting word and stop calling God a liar. You've been calling God a liar all along — "No, no, God can't forgive my sins, I'm too much of a sinner." Now all you have to do is say: okay, God, you're not lying; my sins are forgiven. Well, that's wonderful.

And so the mature Luther will say: believe it and you have it. Just believe that God isn't lying to you when he promises you forgiveness, and you've got the forgiveness. Believe it and you have it. It's faith alone that receives this good gift, because all you can do is say: all right, yes, God is right. Let God be true and every man a liar. If God says I'm forgiven, I'm forgiven — despite the fact that when I look at myself I see lots of sin still in my heart and I'm still perfectly imperfect. But God decides that he wants to forgive me and give me grace and love me and make me his own child. Who am I to argue? I'm in no position to call God a liar. So as long as God is not a liar, I'm safe — which means I'm very, very safe.

The gospel is God saying: believe me, for a change. I want to love you and forgive your sins. You can imagine the immense comfort this is to Luther. Young Luther becomes the mature Luther by finding the comfort of the gospel, by finding something to hang on to, so that for a change he's got a father who loves him.

It's hard to understand what Luther's going on about if you've never quite had that experience of terror. All of us are far from Luther in that point, and we all suffer from what Luther might call smugness. We don't think of ourselves as such great sinners, and therefore we can't find the gospel to be the immense comfort that it was for Luther. But for Luther, the gospel is such great comfort — it's the only thing that gives him any hope of seeing God and knowing God. He doesn't see God; he hears God. God is saying: I love you, I'm your father, it's all okay.

Luther's Enemies: The Devil, the Pope, and the Antichrist

Well, he wants to hang on to this. He hangs on to it for dear life. It's what his life is all about — it's all of his hope. And that means that

whoever tries to take it away from him is his enemy. When we get past the mature Luther to the old Luther, we get to a man who has a great many enemies. He becomes enemies with the Swiss reformers down in Switzerland. He becomes a profound enemy to the Pope, to Jews, to peasants in rebellion. He's got a whole list of enemies. The enemies actually start with the wrath of God and the terrified conscience and the law of God insofar as it accuses him — his enemies start close to home, but they end up spreading out.

In many ways, the most active enemy for Luther is the devil. It's important to understand what he means when he talks about the devil, though. He's not thinking of the smiling figure with a red pitchfork and so on. There's no vivid visual imagination about the devil for Luther — except in an auditory mode. The devil is someone who whispers in the ear of your conscience and says something like: ah, I know you're a sinner. Don't hide it from me. You can't even hide it from your own conscience, can you? You're a sinner and you're going to be damned. We all know that, so stop trying to kid me. That's the devil. Luther will actually imagine these kinds of dialogues in his head when he writes — this experience of having the devil whisper in your ear and try to take away the promise of God, try to undermine your faith in the gospel.

This is an experience that Luther calls Anfechtung, which is German for assault. It's the way the devil attacks your soul and tries to drive you to despair. He actually uses this German word Anfechtung — assault — to translate the Latin word tentatio, which is the word for temptation. So the word we normally translate into English as temptation, Luther translates as assault. Because for him, the great temptation is not to believe the gospel. The great temptation is to let the gospel go and say: oh yes, I am a sinner, I really don't have any hope, do I? And that's what the devil wants. The fundamental work of the devil is to undermine faith in Christ's promises.

And therefore, anyone who threatens to take the gospel away from you is doing the devil's work. That's why for Luther, the great enemy in Christendom is the Pope. Now, it didn't start out that way. Let's go back to the 95 Theses. When Luther posted those on Halloween 1517, they spoke very respectfully of the Pope. He criticized the whole notion of indulgences, but he didn't criticize the Pope per se. He said: well, the Pope doesn't intend this kind of abuse. Surely the Pope wants to reform this abuse called indulgences and do something better to encourage true contrition and true faith.

Well, as I mentioned, these Latin theses got translated into German against Luther's wishes, became published, became a cause of controversy. Germans all over Germany heard about them and thought: yes, there's finally someone standing up for us, trying to stop the Pope from fleecing us. And he actually wants to do this by turning us back to true religion — to the religion of Augustine and the Bible, turning us to Christ. We've got to do this. And the Pope had better not try to stop us.

The Pope tried to stop them. The course of the controversy is very complex and I can't even begin to summarize it here, other than to say this: Luther became convinced that the Pope was trying to take the gospel away from him and from other Christians. Luther was convinced that when the Pope opposed the move to reform the abuses of indulgences, what he was really trying to do was capture or appropriate all of the means of grace and keep them to himself — as if to say, you're not going to get any grace unless I give it to you.

And that means the Pope was doing the devil's work. Because the gospel was given to everyone freely by God, for the comfort of every ordinary person — not just for priests and monks, for heaven's sake, but for all of Christendom. The priests and monks and all the rest are only there in order to preach the gospel and to give this kind word to other people. And the Pope wants to take that kind word away

from us — wants to keep it to himself and not give us any grace unless we pay him for it. The Pope is doing the devil's work. He is Antichrist.

Luther concluded this, and he called the Pope the Antichrist. He didn't mean the last beast of Revelation, but he did mean that the power of Antichrist was represented in the Pope. By that point, you see, there was no more hope of reconciliation between the Roman Catholic Church and the people who were beginning to follow Luther — who included churchmen and priests and powerful rulers in Germany.

The Birth of Protestant Churches

And so, very quickly, churches that followed Luther, and indeed whole territories in Germany that followed Luther, broke off and called themselves evangelical churches — which is to say, gospel churches. They weren't called Protestant churches until a couple of decades after Luther's death, because these evangelical churches protested about something the emperor did. The original name was Evangelical — Evangelischer Kirchen, churches of the Reformation. Later came Protestant churches: churches devoted to the notion that we are justified by faith alone in this gospel in which God, through Christ, gives us this good gift.

And as a result, Christendom was divided. And later on, a great deal of blood was shed. History has its ironies.

Lecture 24: Calvin and Protestantism

Professor Philip Carey

Introduction: From Luther to Calvin

We go now from Luther to Calvin, and thus into the heart of Protestantism. Luther, you'll recall from the last lecture, didn't mean to start anything big. When he posted those 95 Theses, he was just trying to start a debate among scholars, in Latin, in this little town of Wittenberg.

Well, what he started was something that changed the face of European history. He started what Catholics would say is a new church. Luther denied that — Luther said he was just trying to reform the church, and thus we get the term the Reformation.

The Reformation did not start just with Luther, however. At about the same time, down in Switzerland, there was another reform movement going, started by a man named Zwingli — Z-W-I-N-G-L-I. He also was reforming the church. He also was pulling churches away from the power of the Pope at Rome.

So there were two reformations going on simultaneously, and Calvin is in the second generation of the Swiss Reformation. He lived long past Luther, although Luther lived long enough to read one of Calvin's shorter writings, so he'd actually heard of Calvin. But Calvin had not made a major impact on Luther's thinking by the time Luther died, whereas Luther made a very major impact on Calvin.

Calvin inherits the thinking of Luther as well as the thinking of Zwingli in Switzerland. Calvin himself is French, but he ends up in Geneva, in French-speaking Switzerland, and he more or less gets shanghaied into being the leader of the Reformation in Geneva

because he's a talented young man — a brilliant writer, a beautiful preacher, and a terrific organizer. So the people in Geneva said: look, we need to reform the church here and get it out of the control of these popes and priests. You do it. You lead it for us. And Calvin in Geneva had some rocky moments — they actually sent him into exile for a while — but by and large, Calvin stuck with Geneva for the rest of his life, with that one exception, and changed the face of Geneva, and thereby really changed the face of Europe.

He was more fundamentally and consistently rock-bottom Reformed. He intended from the very beginning to change things drastically. He intended to create a reformed church — a church reformed according to the Word of God.

In fact, the branch of the Reformation associated with Calvin is often called the Reformed branch, as opposed to the Lutheran branch. So it's slightly confusing. The Reformation consists of more than just the Reformed Protestants. The Reformed Protestants are only one wing of the Reformation. Lutherans are another wing — they are not Reformed, but they are part of the Reformation. And then there are Anabaptists and Mennonites and such, which form a third wing of the Reformation.

We're going to be focusing now on the Reformed wing of the Reformation, of which Calvin is the greatest and most important spokesperson. This is, in a sense, Protestantism in its purest form. As we'll see, Luther is still a bit more Catholic than Calvin is.

Calvin and the Institutes of the Christian Religion

Calvin is, in addition to being the reformer of Geneva, the author of the Institutes of the Christian Religion, which in its fourth edition is a very large work. It is the great systematic theology of Protestantism. So Calvin really is the first systematic thinker of Protestantism. Luther

wrote a great deal, but he never gathered it all together in one place as a systematic theology. Calvin did. Which meant that Calvinism — or the Reformed version of Protestantism — was exportable in a way that Lutheranism wasn't. You could export it in the form of this one large book called the Institutes.

It started out short, but it went through four editions and grew with each one. By the fourth edition, it was quite a large book. But still just one book — enough to carry around into France, and then into Holland, and then into England, where the Reformed wing of the Reformation became very influential. It became influential in England under the name of Puritanism. The Presbyterians are, to this day, indebted to this Reformed tradition, and the more historically-minded Presbyterians are, by and large, Calvinists.

Common Themes of the Reformation: The Three Solas

Now I'd like to look at some of the common themes of the Reformation — things that Calvin and Luther would share — and then start making some distinctions and differentiations. So let's begin with the common theology of the Reformation.

Luther and Calvin both think of human beings fundamentally as sinners standing before God. Both of them invite you to engage in the following thought experiment: imagine coming before the judgment throne of God. You will do it one day, they would add. When you stand in the face of God as your judge, do you want to go up there and say, "All right, God, I'm a pretty good fellow — you have to send me to heaven, you have to reward me. I'm not perfect, but I'm pretty good. What are you complaining about?" Do you want to claim that you're good enough on your own, by your own merits,

to deserve eternal life? Or are you a bit wiser than that? Are you inclined to plead for mercy?

Well, if you're inclined to plead for mercy, then you're ready for the next step. The next step can be summarized in three solas — from the Latin S-O-L-A, meaning alone. Faith alone, grace alone, scripture alone. These are the three solas of the Reformation.

Faith alone means justification by faith alone. We've already encountered that in Luther. Calvin strongly endorsed that doctrine in basically the same form that Luther taught it.

Grace alone means, once again, that it is only grace that allows us to be saved. Our own decisions are part of the story, but they always come after grace. We do decide for God, but that's because grace comes to us first — preveniently. Grace comes before any decision of ours and causes us to turn to God. So we do turn to God, we are converted to God, but that's because grace comes first. We ourselves are not responsible for our own salvation. We're part of the process, but always as secondary causes, not primary causes. Grace alone is the ultimate source of our salvation, and not ourselves — grace meaning, of course, the grace of God.

And thirdly, scripture alone. This is a crucial principle that both Calvin and Luther would use against the Pope. The idea is that only the Bible is the authoritative source of Christian doctrine. The Pope has certain kinds of human authority — certain kinds of administrative authority over the church, if he was a good Pope — but the Pope has absolutely no authority to teach anything that was not already taught in the Bible. The Christian tradition can only teach what is taught in the Bible, at least insofar as anything is to be taught to Christians as required for faith. The Christian tradition does many things that aren't in the Bible, but nothing should be taught to Christians as required for faith except what is taught in the Bible.

That's what it means: scripture alone. No Christian doctrine can be based on anything other than the Bible. The Christian tradition itself should bear witness solely to the teachings of Scripture.

Protestants and Catholics on Merit

So that's the common theology of the Reformation. We can now contrast it with Catholic theology of the time. We can focus this contrast on the Roman Catholic doctrine of merit.

Merit is something that makes Lutherans and Calvinists see red. When they hear talk of merit, they get angry and they start writing words of fire. For the Protestants, both Lutheran and Calvinist, no one merits anything from God. No one earns anything from God. That's what it means to say we're saved by grace alone. It's all a free gift. No one is worthy of God's approval all on their own.

When Catholics see that, they say: wait a minute — are you saying that God gives us grace and doesn't make any real change in us? Doesn't God's grace in us cause us to merit God's approval? So Catholics — following Augustine, and one of the things going on here is that both Catholics and Protestants are trying to claim Augustine is on their side — Catholics will say: look, God gives us grace, of course, but that grace changes us so that we actually do deserve God's approval. We actually can merit eternal life through grace. And Protestants say, no, no, no, it doesn't work like that. Remember that thought experiment. You come to the judgment throne of God — you're going to claim your own merits? That's crazy. That's foolish. We come to the judgment throne of God and we claim the merits of Christ, Calvin will insist. We claim only undeserved mercy given to us by Christ.

Now, let's look at this from both sides, because this is actually a matter that's been discussed in ecumenical theology in recent years,

and Catholics and Protestants are getting very, very close to a full agreement on this point. So look at the Catholic side. The Catholics are saying: grace has got to change us somehow. When it comes into our hearts, it ought to make us more worthy of God's approval. And merit language, for Catholics, is the appropriate way of registering the fact that God, in giving us grace, really does change us so that we are genuinely more worthy of God's approval. Something has to register the fact that we actually do end up making progress in becoming more worthy of God's approval.

Now look at the Protestant side. Their worry is that people are going to try to rest on, build on, or trust in their own worthiness, and that this is not an appropriate way to approach God. The Protestants do insist that grace will change us, but they don't call that justification, and they won't use the language of merit. They'll call it sanctification — a gradual progress toward a more holy life. But never, at any point in our lives, are we in a position to say: I deserve God's approval. I'm getting better, I'm getting more holy, I'm learning things, but I never deserve God's approval. That would be like going to the judgment throne of God and saying, "Oh, I'm a nice person — you have to send me to heaven, don't you, God?"

Now, what's going on in recent ecumenical discussions between Catholics and Protestants is an attempt to say both of these things at the same time, without getting tripped up by the language of merit. The basic agreement is: because of God's grace, yes, people do actually become more worthy of God's approval; yet, on the other hand, we really shouldn't trust in our own worthiness — we should trust in the mercy of God. When you say it that way, it sounds like common sense for most Christians. Of course we get better and more worthy of God's approval, but of course we trust fundamentally in God's mercy and grace and not in ourselves. If you state it carefully enough and in simple enough terms, it seems that Catholics

and Protestants can end up agreeing. But they didn't agree in the 16th century. It became a matter of immense controversy, and in my hopeful view, it was based on misunderstanding — they didn't want to understand each other. And as a result, they wrote long books criticizing each other, and unfortunately, also as a result, Europe was divided in ways that spilled a great deal of blood.

Authority: A Mutual Misunderstanding

Let's look at another point of difference — a fascinating one, because I think it's a misunderstanding that Protestants and Catholics still haven't gotten over. Protestants typically accuse Catholics of being authoritarian: you believe in that Pope and all that, whereas the only authority for us Protestants is the Bible. Why are you putting so much authority in the Pope and the priests and all that other stuff?

The other side of it is that Catholics tend to think of Protestants as authoritarian. Because Catholics tend to think that faith alone is not sufficient for the Christian life. You have to have all these other things going on, including the use of your reason. Catholics will go back to that old faith-and-reason contrast and say: look, there needs to be a synthesis of faith and reason. Reason has to be part of the picture. You can't have faith alone. And that means you can't simply bow down to authorities, even the authority of the Bible. You need to think this through. You start with faith, you start by believing what the Bible teaches, but then you think and you learn and you grow and you use your reason. You don't just be authoritarian by saying, "Oh, the Word of God, the Word of God — whatever God says, God says it, I believe it." Catholics find that authoritarian. So both Catholics and Protestants think the other side is authoritarian. It's really very interesting that way.

I think the Catholic view stems ultimately from Augustine's way of contrasting authority and reason. Remember the math class analogy — the teacher has a certain kind of authority. You believe what the teacher says until you can figure it out for yourself, and then you leave the authority behind because you see it for yourself. I think Catholics are actually following that Augustinian contrast between reason and authority, which means that ultimately we get to see God for ourselves. We start out by believing the authority of the Bible, but in heaven — or whatever heaven symbolically means — we get to see it for ourselves. We're not resting on authority.

Whereas for the Protestants, you never get beyond the Word of God. The Word of God is how you know God. We don't see God with our minds — we hear him by hearing what he has to say for himself. The Word of God has the authority of God, and that authority marks his otherness, the fact that he is another person who speaks for himself. And if you want to know him, you have to hear what he has to say for himself.

So I think, in fact, both Catholics and Protestants are right — they're both authoritarian. They both have a belief in a certain kind of authority as essential to Christian faith.

The Loss of the Contemplative Ideal

One last thing about the common theology of Protestantism — something that I think hasn't been noticed very well, but which is a huge phenomenon when you look at the Reformation from the standpoint of medieval and Augustinian theology.

With the Protestants, we lose — or drop, or forget, or get rid of — a certain kind of contemplative ideal: the ideal of intellectual vision that Augustine was so intent on, the notion that our goal is a certain kind of vision and contemplation of ultimate truth. That's something

that Augustine and the mystics and the other Christian Platonists all had in common. And it just drops out of Protestantism — because of this focus on the Word of God, because of this focus on justification rather than on vision, because the real issue is: how can we get into a situation where God won't be angry at us and will accept us?

It seems to me that Protestant theology is at its best when it figures out a way of replacing this Platonist theme of intellectual vision — so important in Augustine — with a theology of the word that says: look, this is how we know God. It's like knowing another person, like the way I know my wife. She made a wedding vow, and I believe it on her authority. That's how you know another person — on her own authority. She speaks, and she has the authority to say who she is. And that's how you have to know this other person, God — by believing what he has to say for himself. It's like that, but in this wedded, nuptial relationship between God and the human self. That would be a line of Protestant theology that culminates in the 20th century in Karl Barth.

But on the other hand, Protestantism is at its worst when this Augustinian contemplative ideal — this Augustinian Platonist spirituality — is replaced by nothing more than an attempt to get yourself into heaven, which of course is what Luther was trying to get away from at the very beginning of his career anyway. You can see this in the worst kind of Protestant preaching, for whom the bottom line really is: how do you get to heaven? Well, you get to heaven by faith alone. That means you make this decision of faith, and then you're all set — you're safe, you're scot-free, you're not in trouble anymore. And you've all heard it, right? Where faith in what the Bible preaches is a kind of mechanism for getting into heaven, which is actually the bottom line. The love of God, the knowledge of God, seeing God, knowing God — that's not the bottom line. The bottom

line is getting to heaven, whatever that is. That's Protestantism at its worst.

Luther and Calvin: A Crucial Distinction

Okay, so there's the common theology of Protestantism. Now I'm going to try to start making some distinctions between varieties of Protestantism, because I'm absolutely fascinated myself by the difference between Luther and Calvin, which requires some fine points to distinguish properly.

Luther, from a Calvinist perspective, is still kind of half Catholic. And you'll hear Calvinists talk about Luther this way — he didn't quite free himself from all this Catholic baggage. In particular, for Luther, the gospel works the way a sacrament works. Remember in the Luther lecture, I talked about the word of absolution, which Luther identified as a form of the gospel. This took place in the sacrament of penance. Here you were participating in a Catholic sacrament, and the sacramental sign in this sacrament is, for Luther, this gospel word — this promise of forgiveness.

So the gospel works just like a sacrament. A sacrament in Catholic thinking is an external sign which confers the grace that it signifies. A sacrament is a sign that signifies grace and also confers it when you receive it in faith. So when you receive this word in faith — this word of absolution — it confers absolution and remission of sins when you receive it in faith. That's sacramental thinking, following the theology of sacramental power that was developed in medieval Catholicism beginning around the 12th century.

The Calvinists, on the other hand, tend to think of the gospel differently. Think of the contrast here. The word of absolution that Luther is thinking about is something uttered at a particular time and place. You're confronted with a particular utterance at a particular

time and place. Likewise, there's the baptismal formula: "I baptize you in the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit." That's the model for the word of absolution, obviously — "I absolve you of your sins in the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit" is modeled on this baptismal formula. And that is said to you only once in your life, when you're baptized. The word you in that formula refers to someone different depending on which baptism it is. So it's a particular utterance at a particular time in a particular place. That's what it means to say it's external — it's historical, it's sensible, you hear it with your physical ears.

Whereas for the Calvinists, and Calvin in particular, the gospel tends to be thought of as a general promise, such as: if you believe in Christ, you are saved. That is not something that has to be uttered at a particular time and place. Obviously it can be, but it's not tied down to any particular moment of utterance. "If you believe in Christ, you are saved" refers to anybody. Whereas "I baptize you," in a particular context, refers to one particular person. It's only you in that particular context. Whereas "if you believe in Christ, you are saved" refers to any you that fits the condition of believing in Christ. So it's a conditional promise: if you believe, you're saved.

And Lutherans will point that out and say: look, you've got this conditional promise, and you have to meet the condition before you can be saved. For Luther, you don't have to say, "Oh, I know I believe, therefore I know I'm saved." You simply say, "Is God lying to me when he promises to forgive me? No, he's not. Okay." Whereas the Calvinists have this problem: if you believe, you're saved — and that means that in order to be assured of your salvation, you have to be assured that you actually do believe. And thus there is a typically Calvinist anxiety: do I have true faith? Is my faith real faith? Because if your faith isn't real faith, then you can't be sure that you're saved.

You have to know that you really believe in order to know that you're saved.

That's not a problem from Luther's standpoint. For Luther, if you want to know whether God intends to save you, you ask: were you baptized? Did God say to you, "I baptize you in the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit"? That was God saying that. Was he lying to you when he said it? No. All right. Believe it. Whereas for Calvinists, in order to believe the promise, you have to believe that you believe it, as it were. And if things go wrong for a Calvinist, it can become very introspective. You try to find out whether you have true faith. And you can read this kind of crisis of conscience among Calvinist writers — if they had a conversion experience and then were backsliding and getting cold in the faith, they might ask: did I really get converted? Did I really believe? Do I have real faith? Or maybe I just thought I believed.

Predestination and the Once-for-All Justification

This actually ties into another distinctive feature of Calvinism — one that I think in many ways is the distinctive feature of Calvinism. It hasn't really been noticed as such, but it's a fine point that I think makes all the difference. For the Calvinists, beginning with Calvin, you are justified only once in your life. Justification is a one-time event. It happens when you're converted. You have a conversion experience, and then you're justified.

Now contrast this with Luther — and indeed with all of the Roman Catholic tradition — where justification was used to describe what happened every time you confessed your sins and received absolution. So every time you go to the priest as a Catholic, confess your sins, and receive absolution, that means you're justified. It happens often. Luther thinks it should happen every day. You're

constantly saying, "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." God forgives you, you get justified. So it's a recurrent event. Whereas for the Calvinists, it happens only once.

In Luther's view of justification, therefore — or the Catholic view for that matter — anyone who's justified might end up being damned. Because you confess your sins, you get forgiven, but the next day you sin again. And if you stop confessing your sins, stop living like a Christian, stop ever repenting and just turn to sin and turn away from the process of repentance, then you could end up dying in your sins — dying in mortal sin, as Catholics will say. So it's quite possible, in this view, for someone to be justified at one point in their life and then end up damned.

What prevents that, for those who are saved, is what Augustine calls the gift of perseverance — perseverance in the faith. You are justified, your sins are forgiven, and you have to persevere in this Christian life where you keep asking for forgiveness of sins, keep receiving it, live a Christian life to the end of your days, die in the faith, and then you're saved. But not everybody does that. Some people fall away from the faith, some people turn away from the good life, some people turn away from Christ, and they die in unbelief and can be damned. So a justified person can end up damned in Lutheranism and in Catholicism. Not in Calvinism.

That's the key difference. I think that's what makes Calvinist theology distinct from other forms of theology in the West. For Calvin, you're justified only once in life. It's a one-time event, a conversion which changes you from death to life, and after that event you're guaranteed to be saved. You know you believe, and therefore — since if you believe in Christ, you will be saved — this is your conversion experience where you come to faith, and from this point onward you know that you believe in Christ and know you're going

to be saved. Except in those moments when you don't know it, and you're anxious about whether you have true faith and all that.

So what ends up happening is you get a different kind of spirituality in Calvinism. In particular, you get a kind of spirituality in which the issue of predestination arises in a different way than for the rest of the Christian tradition. I should mention that predestination becomes an issue with Augustine — it's not something Calvin invented. Calvin gets the rap for predestination, but his doctrine of predestination is, in most respects, no different from Augustine's and Luther's and even Thomas Aquinas'.

Except in a couple of technical details. One technical detail is that Augustine never quite says that God predestines some people to be damned. God predestines some people to be saved and he neglects to predestine others — he just sort of lets them alone. Calvin will actually go ahead and say God predestines some to be damned. Augustine does seem to say something like that at one point, but Catholics deny it and there's a big argument about whose side Augustine is on,

Coda to Part II: The Christian Age

The story told in Part II is, in one sense, a story of synthesis. Yet it is equally a story of tension. The encounter between the biblical inheritance of Jerusalem and the philosophical inheritance of Athens did not produce a seamless fusion. It produced a civilization whose greatest achievements emerged precisely because two very different visions of reality learned to inhabit the same intellectual space. Throughout these lectures, we have witnessed that encounter unfold in all its creativity, complexity, and occasional instability.

The biblical tradition introduced a radically different way of understanding the world from that of classical philosophy. The Greeks generally sought timeless truths, eternal forms, and universal principles. The Hebrew scriptures presented a God who acted within history, entered into covenantal relationships, made promises, judged nations, forgave failures, and guided a people through time. Truth was not discovered solely through contemplation. It was also revealed through events, relationships, and sacred history. The God of Abraham was not merely the highest principle of metaphysics. He was a living presence who spoke, commanded, and remembered.

Yet Christianity did not simply replace Greek philosophy. Instead, it absorbed and transformed it. The Church Fathers inherited concepts, methods, and questions developed over centuries of philosophical reflection. Nowhere is this more evident than in Augustine. His thought united biblical faith with the inward spirituality of Platonism, creating a vision of the human soul that would shape Western self-understanding for centuries. His reflections on grace, desire, memory, and free will gave Christianity an intellectual depth that allowed it to engage philosophy on equal terms rather than retreat from it.

The same pattern appears throughout the medieval period. Plotinus provided a language of spiritual ascent. Aquinas incorporated

Aristotle into a vast theological architecture. The debate over universals explored questions about language and reality that continue to shape philosophy today. Mystics such as Meister Eckhart pushed inwardness toward experiences of divine union that tested the limits of orthodoxy. Reformers such as Luther and Calvin revisited the teachings of Paul and Augustine, reopening questions that had never been entirely settled. Again and again, faith and reason met, challenged one another, and generated new forms of understanding.

What emerged from this long process was the civilization we call Christendom. It was never as unified as later nostalgia sometimes imagines, nor as intellectually stagnant as its critics occasionally suggest. Medieval thought was vibrant, argumentative, and remarkably ambitious. It sought nothing less than a comprehensive understanding of reality. Theology, philosophy, ethics, politics, law, and science all occupied places within a larger framework ordered toward God. Truth was assumed to be unified because reality itself was assumed to be unified.

And yet the very success of this synthesis created new problems.

The medieval worldview depended upon a delicate balance. Revelation and reason were understood as complementary. Scripture and philosophy ultimately pointed toward the same truth. Ecclesiastical authority provided intellectual cohesion. But as the centuries passed, pressures began to accumulate. New discoveries challenged inherited assumptions. Political conflicts weakened traditional institutions. Economic change transformed social structures. Intellectual disputes multiplied. The confidence that had sustained the medieval synthesis became increasingly difficult to maintain.

Indeed, many of the developments that will shape the next stage of Western thought begin within the Christian Age itself. The nominalism of Ockham raises questions about universals that will

alter conceptions of knowledge. The Reformation fractures religious unity. Humanist scholars recover ancient texts with fresh eyes. Explorers expand the geographical horizons of Europe. The invention of printing accelerates the circulation of ideas. Gradually, the intellectual center of gravity begins to shift.

What follows is not the abandonment of Christianity, nor the disappearance of theology. The next era remains deeply religious. Yet authority itself becomes a subject of scrutiny. The inherited certainties of the medieval world encounter a growing confidence in individual inquiry, empirical observation, and intellectual independence.

This transition leads us directly into Part III.

The Renaissance and the Age of Reason represent both continuity and rupture. They continue many medieval concerns while questioning many medieval assumptions. Ancient texts are rediscovered, but now often outside their traditional theological frameworks. New scientific methods emerge. New political realities demand new theories. Philosophers begin asking whether certainty can be established on foundations other than tradition and authority.

The great question of Part II was how faith and reason might coexist within a unified vision of reality. The great question of Part III becomes whether reason can stand on its own.

The journey ahead will introduce figures such as Machiavelli, Bacon, Descartes, Hobbes, and Spinoza. Their projects differ enormously, yet they share a common ambition: to rebuild knowledge, politics, and society on foundations capable of surviving doubt. Some will challenge the medieval inheritance directly. Others will seek to reform it. Still others will attempt to transcend it altogether.

The Christian Age leaves behind a profound legacy. It teaches that human beings hunger not only for knowledge but also for meaning,

not only for explanation but also for purpose. Those concerns will not disappear in the modern world. They will simply be asked in new ways, under new conditions, and with new confidence in the powers of the human mind.

The synthesis of Athens and Jerusalem has shaped Western civilization for a millennium. The next chapter begins when that synthesis starts to unravel, and when the modern search for certainty begins in earnest.

Part III: From the Renaissance to the Age of Reason

Preamble

Every great intellectual shift begins with a dissatisfaction. Someone looks at the inherited framework of thought and finds it not merely incomplete but actively obstructive — a system that generates confident answers to questions no one is really asking, while leaving the questions that matter most either unanswered or forbidden. The twelve lectures of Part III trace one of the most consequential such dissatisfactions in the history of Western thought: the long, turbulent, and irreversible rupture with medieval Christendom that produced, over the course of roughly three centuries, the intellectual world we still inhabit. It is a story with heroes and martyrs, with books burned and hands nailed to speakers' platforms and quiet men who changed the universe in country houses during a plague. It is also a story with no simple moral, because the world the thinkers of this period built was shot through with the same tensions — between reason and faith, freedom and order, the individual and the community — that they had inherited from the world they were dismantling.

The introductory lecture maps the terrain with characteristic briskness. Europe between roughly 1450 and 1700 was being remade by forces that no philosophy had anticipated: the discovery of two continents, the fracturing of a unified Christendom into competing confessions, the emergence of centralized nation-states, the acceleration of commerce, and the development of a printing press that could make a monk's private protest into a continent-wide revolution within months. Into this volatile environment come the thinkers of Part III, each responding in a different register to the same fundamental disruption — the collapse of a civilization's

confidence in its own received authorities. What Aristotle had been for the Middle Ages, what the Church had been, what the ancient past in general had been, could no longer simply be assumed. The question was not what the authorities said. The question, urgent and unsettling, was how one could know anything at all.

The Renaissance sections of this part offer two sharply contrasting responses to that question, both rooted in a recovery of classical antiquity but arriving at very different conclusions. Machiavelli, that troubling and indispensable Florentine, takes the Roman historians and the Greek political thinkers at their most unsentimental and turns them into the foundation of a new political science. His concern is not what power ought to look like but what it actually does — how states are acquired, held, and lost, what virtues a prince must possess in reputation and which he must sometimes abandon in practice. The famous distance between Machiavelli's realism and Christian political ethics is real, but it is not simple cynicism. It is the distance between a man who has watched republics fall and empires crumble and one who has not. What Machiavelli inaugurates is the habit of studying political life as a natural phenomenon governed by discoverable regularities, and that habit — the foundation of modern political science — will outlast every controversy his name has ever generated.

Thomas More and Erasmus represent the other face of Renaissance humanism, the northern face, where the recovery of classical learning is placed in deliberate service of Christian renewal rather than offered as its replacement. More's Utopia is a jest and a provocation simultaneously, deploying the comic names and fictional apparatus of a travel tale to say things about private property, social justice, and the relationship between pleasure and virtue that could not safely be said directly. It is, at bottom, an attempt to marry Platonic communism to the social gospel of the Beatitudes, and its failure to

be entirely serious about either is part of its enduring fascination. Erasmus, meanwhile, wages a quieter war against the twin enemies of superstition and enthusiasm, finding in classical restraint — the golden mean, the rejection of excess, the discipline of the philological scholar — the antidote to everything from fraudulent relics to Luther's fiery predestinarianism. His quarrel with Luther over the freedom of the will is one of the great intellectual breaks of the sixteenth century, and it illuminates a fault line that runs through all of modern thought: whether human beings have genuine agency in their own salvation, and what it means to say so.

The scientific lectures at the center of this part deserve special attention, because they represent not merely a change in what Europeans believed about the heavens but a change in what they believed about knowledge itself. Galileo's insistence that God's second revelation is the book of nature, written in the language of mathematics and accessible only through observation and quantitative proof, carries within it the demolition of an entire pedagogical world. When he says that not even the Pope can make a fact not a fact, he is not being simply irreverent; he is articulating a new criterion of truth that makes the authority of tradition irrelevant to the question of how the universe is actually organized. Bacon's New Organon translates this spirit into a manifesto for cooperative, cumulative, inductive science, driven not by the desire for philosophical reputation but by the Christian imperative of charity — knowledge in the service of reducing human suffering and extending human power over nature.

Descartes attempts to rebuild the entire edifice of human knowledge on a foundation that cannot be doubted, and in doing so creates both the most influential philosophical system of the seventeenth century and its most vexing unsolved problem: how a soul that does not occupy space can interact with a body that does. Hobbes takes

the mechanistic world-picture and applies it to politics with unsentimental rigor, arguing that the only honest account of human nature is one built on fear and the desire for security, and that the sovereign state is not an expression of natural human sociality but a calculated remedy for its absence. Spinoza pushes the mechanistic premise to its logical extreme, collapsing Descartes' dualism into a single substance — God or nature — and offering, in place of the Judeo-Christian personal deity, a pantheistic reverence for all of being that will inspire Romantics and scandalize orthodox believers for centuries.

Pascal and Bayle stand at the intersection of all these currents as fideists — thinkers who use skepticism not to undermine faith but to expose the limits of reason and thereby make room for it. Pascal's Pensées remain among the most psychologically acute documents ever written about the human condition, and his famous wager is less an argument than a provocation: a challenge to take seriously what is actually at stake. Bayle, the most widely read author in eighteenth-century France, spent his life trying to humble rational arrogance in the name of Calvinist piety, and succeeded chiefly in providing the philosophes of the next generation with their most useful ammunition.

Newton closes the part and opens a new era. His achievement is not simply scientific but cultural — a demonstration that the universe is lawful, knowable, and mathematically elegant, and that the human mind is capable of grasping its architecture. The confidence that radiates from Alexander Pope's famous couplet — God said, let Newton be, and all was light — is the founding mood of the Enlightenment toward which this entire part has been building. After Newton, the question is no longer whether reason can unlock the secrets of nature. The question is how far that method can be extended, and at what cost.

Lecture 25: Introduction to the Renaissance and the Age of Reason

Professor Darren Staloff

Overview

In this lecture, we examine the period running from the Renaissance through the 17th century Age of Reason. We'll first look at some of the historical context in which philosophy developed during this period. Then we'll look at what are really probably the two most important moments philosophically speaking: the Renaissance in Southern and Northern Europe, and then the Age of Reason associated with the rationalists Descartes and others. Finally, we'll offer some concluding remarks about the seminal role of Sir Isaac Newton and his work in bringing the Age of Reason to a close and ushering in the famed 18th century Enlightenment.

So let's begin by talking a bit about the transformation of Europe from the close of the 15th to the close of the 17th centuries.

Historical Context

This was an epoch in which Latin Christendom was fundamentally transformed. It is, in fact, the period which marks the end of the feudal epic and the medieval period, and really the birth of our modern age. There are a host of different developments which mark and signalize this transformation. And as we'll see over the remainder of the course, from this period on, modernity is characterized in the West by an increasing rate of change, development, and transformation.

The Age of Discovery

The end of the 15th century, as we know, marked the beginning of the Age of Discovery. In 1492, Columbus sailed the ocean blue, and in so doing fundamentally transformed Europeans' understanding of the world. Learning that there was a new world changed dramatically the way Europeans thought of their position on the globe. That, coupled with the circumnavigation of the globe, brought Europeans into contact with peoples and cultures with profoundly different beliefs, practices, and values. And it was this exposure to different cultures — whether in the Americas, in Africa, or the East Indies — which challenged Europeans both to account for and defend their own views, as well as to account for the views of those outsiders or strangers.

Indeed, if you read Montaigne, and certainly Montesquieu, the idiom of travel tales becomes an important way in which Europeans judge themselves relative to other cultural traditions. And we'll see this is also true of Thomas More's *Utopia*, for example, which is itself a travel story.

But it wasn't just learning about other cultures and their existence. The circumnavigation of the globe and the creation of a global world for the first time led to an accelerated transfer of technologies and ideas. It is in this period when Europe develops a highly efficient use of block printing, initiated by Gutenberg, along with the development of cannonry, ballistics, and military technologies, the compass — most of which technologies actually come from China and reach Europe through the Middle East — as well as the development of paper, and a whole host of technological advances which would become part of the European toolkit and help facilitate their mastery of the globe.

The Age of Commerce

The Age of Discovery also heralded an Age of Commerce, and there are really two dimensions to this. One is within Europe itself, where the rate of commerce dramatically expands and more and more people find themselves connected to markets. But most famously, the Age of Commerce extended between Europe and the entire rest of the inhabited world.

Particularly Northwestern Europe becomes part of what some scholars have called the first world system, in which commodities are produced for global exchange. Spices from the East are exchanged for metals from the Americas. Textiles from Northern Europe are exported to East Asia and, of course, the New World as well. A whole host of new consumer goods, tastes, and commodities become an important part of the European economic scene.

Gold, and especially silver, from the New World fueled a dramatic price revolution in the 16th and 17th centuries, where the prices of goods doubled in Northwestern Europe. And this led to the development of most of our modern mechanisms of financial capitalism — the bill of exchange, set interest rates, and modern state financing all begin in this period. So in many ways it is the birth of our modern commercial capitalist society.

One of the results of that was that, really for the first time, large numbers of Europeans were tapped into long-distance trade networks. There had been long-distance trade before the Renaissance, but it primarily concerned luxury goods imported for the elites of Europe. It is in this period when consumption of foreign goods becomes fairly common not only among the elite, but throughout broad strata of the middle classes and even some of the laboring classes.

Even more importantly, production — even that of peasants and craftsmen — becomes increasingly geared to international markets and international competition. This produces both the disruptions we know are associated with the business cycle, which first rears its ugly head in Europe, but also prods constant technological innovation, which first emerges in textiles and then spreads to other industries.

The Demographic Revolution and the Nation-State

So far we've seen the Age of Discovery and the Age of Commerce. But accompanying the commercial revolution was a concurrent demographic revolution. Populations of Northwestern Europe doubled at the same time, forcing an economy of resources and a redeployment of labor sources. And with it came the emergence of the early territorial nation-state — that form of political association with which we are now so intensely familiar.

This came about as a direct consequence of the Age of Discovery and the Age of Commerce. The modern nation-state was financed by tax revenues exacted on this growing commerce, which allowed princes to finally ignore the military contributions of their barons and use those funds to hire professional mercenary armies. It was these growing tax revenues which allowed territorial princes to absolutize their powers — that is, to centralize their authority and bureaucratize their administration. The classic example of this is France, and the rise of the Sun King Louis XIV, whose absolute and centralized administration became a model for all competing monarchs of Europe.

It also, however, produced sometimes reactive tendencies. The classic example here is Stuart England, where when the Stuart monarchs — first Charles I, and then later Charles II and his brother James II — tried to introduce what were termed "arbitrary and absolute" measures, they produced nothing so much as a parliamentary revolt on the part of the propertied, and particularly

landed, classes. This resulted in the subsequent rise of the House of Commons and the emergence of the mixed monarchy or mixed republic with which we associate 18th and 19th century Great Britain.

The Wars of Religion

Finally, and perhaps most unfortunately, these centuries were also characterized by a series of intense confessional struggles — religious wars between the Catholic nations and the emerging Protestant nations and churches. We think of the Thirty Years' War, the various struggles of the Dutch for independence. These struggles were peculiarly bloody — perhaps the most bloody and destructive wars Europe faced, certainly before the Napoleonic Wars, and possibly even before the First World War. The virulence with which they were fought by all combatants, Protestant as well as Catholic, ultimately resulted, as we'll see in the late 17th century and then in the Enlightenment, in a powerful reaction against such confessional struggles, which created a strong commitment to religious toleration and quietism in the following generations.

The Renaissance

That's the sort of historical context or backdrop to the epoch. Philosophically, the age is opened by the famous Renaissance. By Renaissance, we mean a rebirth — in this case, a rebirth of classical learning and art associated with figures like Petrarch, Giordano Bruno, and most famously Niccolò Machiavelli in the South. This rebirth was a self-conscious rejection of tradition, in particular of the tradition of medieval scholasticism and its obvious Aristotelianism.

In lieu of such scholasticism, the Renaissance argued for a reemergence of a humanist worldview — a worldview which claimed that man was indeed the measure of the world, that man was indeed a noble creation, as exemplified in the famous lines from

Shakespeare: "What a noble work is man." And it is critical to note that it took the Renaissance to allow us to re-embrace humanism from under the shadow of Augustinian piety — and with it the suggestion that man is a fallen creature, a sinful and evil creature — that had dominated Latin Christendom for at least a millennium.

Now, there was an obvious tension between such Renaissance classicism, such an embrace of the ancient Roman and Greek past, and traditional Christianity. Their values were obviously in many ways antithetical, and it is quite clear that the Renaissance, in embracing pagans, intended that to be a rebuke to the Christian tradition. This is particularly clear with regard to ethical and metaphysical doctrines. Indeed, for most of the Renaissance, there is an embrace of ancient pagan cosmologies and worldviews in place of the traditional Judeo-Christian view of things. And we'll see this is true both in terms of the humanistic disciplines and the sciences.

The Southern Italian Renaissance

It is traditional to demarcate at least two phases of the Renaissance: a southern or Italian phase and a northern phase. The Southern or Italian Renaissance was dominated by the figures I've already mentioned — Petrarch, Bruno, and of course Niccolò Machiavelli, along with a host of lesser figures like Guicciardini and others.

In many ways, the Southern Renaissance was characterized by a much more unflinching embrace of classical humanism. In that way, it was actually much more hostile to Christian ethical, political, and scientific teachings. As we'll see in Machiavelli, the virtues of his *principe* or leader are clearly not Christian virtues. They are classical pagan virtues — the classic cardinal virtues that a Greek or Roman would have understood and respected. And there is a sense in which Machiavelli clearly thinks that Christian values rob a political leader of his manhood, of his virility, of his *virtù*.

The Northern Renaissance

By way of contrast, the Northern Renaissance was far more pietistic. Indeed, one might think of the Reformation itself as an early Northern Renaissance — a rebirth not of classical learning, but of the apostolic Christian tradition. But even those who did embrace classicism, the true Renaissance figures of the North like More and Erasmus, sought to unify classical learning with the social ethic of Christianity, while nonetheless rejecting the scholastic inheritance. That makes them clearly part of the overall Renaissance tradition.

For example, in his *Utopia*, Thomas More sought to show the fundamental affinity he saw between the social teachings of Christ as contained in the Beatitudes — the notion that the meek shall inherit the earth, that blessed are the peacemakers — and those of Plato in the *Republic*. Like Plato, More embraces communism. But unlike Plato, and here the Christian element enters, he insists that a just political order must also be based on a belief in the immortality of the soul and divine punishment and reward. And here again we see the ideal of a Christian humanism.

Similarly in Erasmus, we see a critique of the enthusiasm and dogmatism of Reformed scholasticism — the sort of theological rumination associated with the Protestant Reformation, in his case most specifically that of Martin Luther. In its stead, he urged a far more humanistic concern: a focus on good works and a commitment to religious toleration, as opposed to dogmatism and confessional struggle.

The Scientific Renaissance

Finally, I want to look briefly at the Scientific Renaissance, which would have a profound impact on the course of 17th century thought. The Scientific Renaissance also rejected the scholastic

tradition. It rejected the presumed authority and sanction of scholastic disputation, and its fusion of revealed dogma with Aristotelian metaphysics.

For example, Francis Bacon characterized the scholastic inheritance as one of the "idols of the mind." Scholasticism, for him, was a source of error that alienated us from an understanding of nature and precluded our penetration of nature's greatest mysteries. Instead, he argued for a modern science — a new science, as it were — that would produce not theorems and scholiums, not arguments and disputations, but useful, practical knowledge. And it would do so not by appealing to the authority of the great philosopher Aristotle or through logical disputation, but instead by means of observation and induction — an induction from particulars that was challenged and tested by means of experimentation.

So instead of university disputation, the model of science now becomes organized around the observation of nature and the laboratory as a site of experimental testing. Such a science, in Bacon's mind, would be both cumulative — in that it would grow over time — and cooperative as a venture. It is this combination of cumulative, growing knowledge and cooperation among scientists examining nature which would achieve for him the humanistic goal: the goal of giving man power over his natural environment, of making man the master of his world. And in that way, man would indeed be the measure of all things.

Similarly, Galileo also rejected both the scholastic and scriptural inheritances, arguing that neither Aristotle nor the Bible should have any role in deliberations concerning matters of science. I mentioned the importance of the classical tradition in giving this sort of liberation to scientists. For Galileo, the relevant classical inspiration was Pythagoras — Galileo was a Neo-Pythagorean. And it was from his Pythagoreanism that Galileo was able to claim that "nature is the

book of God" and that it is written in the language of mathematics. Galileo's work clearly looks in both directions here: forward to mathematized physics, and backward to that Pythagorean ideal of a world modeled by means of mathematics and arithmetic.

But there is also a clearly pietistic — though humanistic and classically pietistic — orientation here. For Galileo is saying, in effect, that nature is God's second revelation, and that science is a sort of priestcraft which reveals to us God's will as expressed in the mathematical formulas with which his creation is embodied.

Galileo used this stress on the quantitative rather than the qualitative, both in his understanding of scientific discourse and in his own analysis of nature, to draw what would emerge as a critical metaphysical distinction for the 17th century: that between primary qualities and secondary qualities. Primary qualities are those qualities that Galileo claimed objects really have in and of themselves, and those qualities are all mechanical, quantitative, and objective. They are things like an object's particular mass, shape, and volume, and the rate at which it moves. In contrast, the secondary qualities are all purely qualitative, and they are, of course, the Aristotelian qualities — they refer to the teleologies of things, the purposes by which they work. Put simply, they would be things like the hardness or softness of an object, its colors, its flavors — all of which Galileo would claim are the result of our perception of the object, but are not part of the object itself. Color occurs in our interaction with an object, but that object itself simply has mass and emits energy of a certain wavelength. Galileo didn't quite get to that point, but that's where his argument was headed.

That viewpoint, that distinction, would have immense influence in the following two centuries — both with regard to scientific speculation and the development of mechanics, which would reach its fruition in

the path-breaking work of Newton, and also in the formulation of metaphysics, specifically the metaphysics of materialism.

The Age of Reason

The second epoch is that associated with the 17th century, known as the Age of Reason. The Age of Reason is labeled that because it really marks the birth of modern philosophy — a philosophy which does not need, or at least does not feel the need, to claim authority from the ancients. Such modern philosophy, in fact, has its own unique problems and issues, problems and issues that we don't find addressed in the medieval or even classical period.

The thought of this age is characterized, for example, by a thoroughgoing rejection of all received authorities — religious authorities, scholastic authorities, revealed authorities, and even classical authorities. It is also subject to a growing awareness of the tensions between, on the one hand, the rational philosophic speculation which makes up the Age of Reason, and, on the other, the traditional religious beliefs which seem to be challenged by such philosophic speculation.

The Rationalists

The dominant movement in this Age of Reason is obviously the group known as the rationalists, associated with the famous trinity of Descartes, Hobbes, and Spinoza, but including others like Leibniz. The rationalists sought to construct philosophical systems — they were systems-makers. But what makes these systems distinctive is that they were meant to be designed on the basis of purely mathematical reason. Arithmetical and geometrical reasoning was the model by which these philosophers sought to construct their worldviews. The result was a deep and abiding concern with questions of method, and an attempt at least to discover logical

demonstrations for all conclusions — a goal of a purely rational philosophical worldview. And the model of that, obviously, was mathematics. Mathematics became, for the 17th century rationalists, the model of human rationality. One of the implications of that was a growing affinity for mechanistic interpretations of nature — interpretations that treat the natural world as purely quantitative.

The founder of rationalism, its dominant figure, was of course René Descartes, who formulated the central project of rationalism with his exposition of the rational method of inquiry. This consisted of systematic doubt of all propositions, a careful analysis of all arguments and beliefs into their smallest components, and then a synthesis based on a very careful set of inferences grounded, again, in that sort of mathematical reasoning. That method that Descartes established would characterize the thought of all of the great rationalists.

Descartes' famous principle, *cogito ergo sum* — I think, therefore I am — served as the basis for the widely shared rationalist epistemology, one based on clear and distinct ideas. Descartes claimed that he had found one truth he couldn't doubt: that he existed because he thought. He then examined the phenomenological features of that conviction — what seemed to occur in his mind as he held it — and all he could note about that idea, that distinguished it from others, was that it was clear and distinct. That then became the model of all objective truth. Even so, Descartes' central concerns were metaphysical, and in some ways, despite the fact that he challenged much traditional religious teaching, he didn't completely reject that tradition. He was concerned to prove the existence of God. And he is, of course, the author of our modern dualism — a dualism of mind, which is by nature supersensible and phenomenal, and body, or nature, which is purely mechanical and deterministic. As you'll see in

the lectures, Descartes in fact believed that animals were essentially machines.

Hobbes shared much of Descartes' rationalism, but his primary concerns were political — in part a result of his experience of the tumultuous English Revolution of the mid-17th century. Hobbes grounds his analysis on a very realistic assessment of human psychology and motivation, one which is meant to be scientific. The laws of nature he proffers are purportedly rationally demonstrable scientific truths that can be established through mathematical reasoning. Social contractarianism would offer a fully modern and — obviously commercially influenced — way of thinking about society as comprised of contracts, which is clearly a reflection of the rise of contracts in the great Age of Commerce. It is a fully modern account of political association that would have profound implications and immense influence, from Locke, who adopted the same methodology, to Rousseau, and even to such current thinkers as Rawls.

Spinoza, the third of the great rationalists, shared Descartes' metaphysical concerns as well as his epistemology, but came to radically different conclusions. Instead of dualism, Spinoza embraced monism. And in so doing, he reduced the entire cosmos to the realm of mechanical nature. The result of this was an affirmation of determinacy that was both metaphysical and psychological — not only was the universe determined, but so were our own psychological states. Now, Spinoza's view is obviously the most heretical of the rationalists, and for that he was considered a wicked man. But his pantheism and quasi-Buddhist ethic would be a great source of inspiration for many of the 19th century Romantics, just as his critique of revealed religion would be a source of inspiration for 18th century enlightened natural religion.

The Fideists: Skepticism and Faith

By insisting on nothing less than mathematical certainty, the rationalists opened the door to the reassertion of skepticism. The critical figures here are the fideists. Fideists used skepticism to argue that since one could not have certain knowledge on a purely rational basis, one ought to have resort to faith on the most central issues that face us. So Pierre Bayle dramatized the conflict between faith and reason to argue for the priority of faith. But there was an irony to this, because ultimately it proved a losing battle. Most of his 18th century readers, who were sympathetic to Bayle, interpreted his skepticism not as fideistic, but quite the contrary, as irreligious in intent.

Blaise Pascal also stressed the centrality of faith in God for the most basic and important questions in our lives: What is our fate after we die? What is the meaning of life? Such questions — of truth, the immortality of the soul, and the existence of God — give meaning and direction to our existence, at least in Pascal's mind. And the importance of these issues is highlighted in his famous wager, where the stakes in the question of God's existence are seen to be so very high that we have grounds to indulge our faith, given what the potential rewards might be.

Newton and the Dawn of the Enlightenment

I want to conclude by talking about a figure who really closes the Age of Reason and heralds in the new Age of Enlightenment — and that, of course, is Sir Isaac Newton.

The seminal work of Sir Isaac Newton firmly established the authority of modern mathematical science against the skepticisms of the Bayles and Pascals. It also established the authority of the modern scientific method of deductive argument and experimental testing.

Furthermore, Newton's adoption of the principle of action at a distance signaled the end of the primacy of primary causes in favor of secondary causes. We cease to argue for completely logical demonstrations of the principles by which things act, and instead ask questions of more proximate and measurable causes rather than ultimate and philosophic causes. We simply learn to stop asking what was the nature of providence and what was the ultimate cause of gravity. Newton quite sensibly said: I don't know the cause of gravity — I have simply observed how it works.

Now, Newton himself was intensely pietistic, and meant his work to be a celebration of God. He spent much time working on alchemy and studying the Book of Revelation. But despite his own pietism, Newton's achievement would encourage many, if not most, of his admirers to embrace not traditional Christianity, but natural religion or rational religion — and in particular deism, which became quite the fashion in the 18th century, and which clearly signaled a rejection of traditional Christian revelation.

Newton's mechanics would give rise in the 18th century to a new understanding of the universe — not one governed directly by a God interested in everyday concerns, whose providential care expressed itself in military victories, earthquakes, and natural disasters, but rather a new image of the universe as a vast clockwork. A clockwork designed by an enlightened and mathematically informed deity who simply wound it up and left it to its own inexorable workings. So while the Newtonian scheme may have required us to believe in a creator, it was not a creator who would then concern himself with the everyday concerns of the planet.

And I think that gives us a sense of the remarkable trajectory of this period: as Europe is fundamentally transformed, as Renaissance gives rise to Age of Reason, and as Age of Reason finally closes to give rise to the great 18th century Age of Light.

Lecture 26: Machiavelli and the Origins of Political Science

Professor Darren Staloff

Introduction

Niccolò Machiavelli, the famed Florentine theorist, writer, and scholar, is really one of the most representative figures of the Southern or Italian Renaissance. As we noticed in our introductory lecture, the Southern Renaissance was characterized by its fervid embrace of classical humanism and classical learning — a posture, philosophic and moral, which in many ways stood in tension with the received Christian tradition and values. And nowhere is this more obvious than in the work of Machiavelli.

This is true in both his *Prince*, which we'll be examining in this lecture, and his *Discourses*, a far larger work devoted to republican government. I mention the *Discourses* only because it's important to keep in mind that while the *Prince* is a handbook for the *principe*, or rulers, Machiavelli's own politics were in fact republican. He had been a lesser figure in the Florentine Republic prior to the rise of the Medicis, and in his *Discourses on Livy* expressed his rationale for embracing republican government and the forms which it would require — and we'll touch on those as we discuss the *Prince*.

Ostensibly, the *Prince* is written for Lorenzo de' Medici, the new ruler of Florence, in order to presumably prompt him to unify Italy and drive out the barbaric French invaders. But obviously, it was also intended to secure Machiavelli a post as a minister in Medici's government. Other scholars have argued that it was probably actually first drafted not for Lorenzo, but for his brother, the Pope. Nonetheless, it is a supremely practical work, a work devoted to the

question of how one acquires, secures, holds, and improves princely power. And by princely power, we mean the power of a *principe* — a ruler or leader — not necessarily a hereditary monarch.

And its stark realism is in fact both critically important to and representative of that very tension between the idealism of the Christian tradition and the realism that Machiavelli at least found in classical thought. I want to read a brief passage that he expresses in Chapter 15 for Lorenzo:

Many have imagined republics and principalities which have never been seen or known to exist in reality. For how we live is so far removed from how we ought to live that he who abandons what is done for what ought to be done will rather learn to bring about his own ruin than his preservation. A man who wishes to make a profession of goodness in everything must necessarily come to grief among so many who are not good. Therefore, it is necessary for a prince who wishes to maintain himself to learn how not to be good, and to use this knowledge and not use it according to the necessity of the case.

What we're going to do in this lecture is examine Machiavelli's analysis of various sorts of regimes, and in so doing, we'll see he is really formulating the foundational principles of modern political science. We'll examine the various forms of regime, the questions of how one acquires and secures power in those regimes, and what sort of virtues the prince should have — both in reputation and in practice.

Types of Principalities

Machiavelli analyzes all principalities or states on the basis of whether they are, first, either the result of a long line of dynastic or established hereditary monarchy, or are newly founded states.

He argues that the former — those which are dynastic, traditional states — are fairly easy to maintain as long as tradition and custom are respected. That is to say, if you are the hereditary monarch of a state whose dynasty has controlled it for a while, as long as you obey the customs and mores of the community, it's quite easy to hold on to power. And this is a finding which Weber would later confirm in his discussion of traditional authority.

What's more interesting are the latter sorts of principalities — those which are newly founded. They are much more difficult to control and retain, because men who have once changed masters to overthrow an old monarch and install a new one are quite amenable to doing that again when you yourself are the ruler. So the real difficulty in such a situation will depend on a variety of different factors.

If the kingdom that is newly established has the same culture and language as the prince, the situation is not as critical as it might otherwise be. The prince needs simply to make sure to eliminate all members of the old royal family, so that there is no reversionary interest, and the populace will hardly notice the difference. He adduces many examples from his own time. We could think of the replacement of the Stuarts by the House of Hanover in England, which to this day most Americans don't know actually occurred — it was a fairly seamless transition. One might also think of the reaction of peasants to the demise of the Romanovs and the rise of Lenin, something that many of them may not have even noticed as a profound impact on their lives outside of some procedural reforms.

And in both of those cases, they broadly followed the wisdom of the *Prince*. Not entirely, however. Lenin did kill off the entire family of the Romanovs. The Hanoverians were not so fortunate as to see all of the Stuarts executed when they were exiled, and the result was a series

of Jacobite risings in the 18th century — again confirming Machiavelli's insight.

A much more delicate situation occurs when the prince is the head of a new kingdom with a language and culture different from his own. In that case, it requires real skill and *virtù* — political mastery — to be able to maintain power.

Well, the prince has a couple of different options. First, Machiavelli enjoins the prince to reside in that new territory, because problems and insurrections are much easier to both detect and remedy if the ruler is, as it were, on the spot. Secondly, the prince should always attempt to plant colonies at strategic locations in the new principality — colonies of people who share his language and customs. This was, in fact, the practice of both the Romans and ancient Greeks. Such colonies, he argues, are cheaper than garrisons and more effective, because they create pro-government forces, populations which are dependent on the new prince, and create factions within the society, making it easier for the prince to divide and conquer.

And of course, the prince should always side with his less powerful neighbors against his more powerful rivals. Again, the classical examples are in Rome's expansion into Sicily and southern Europe, where they sided with the weaker Greek city-states against the stronger Carthaginians. The great counterexample, of course, is that of Louis of France in Naples, which Machiavelli discusses. But we can find several examples in our own 20th century history as well. In both world wars, the United States sided with the side that would have lost had we not entered, and in that way assured that when the war ended, we would emerge as the hegemon. One might also think of England taking that same role with regard to the Napoleonic Wars, siding with all the weaker states of continental Europe against the great rival of Napoleonic France.

Principalities Governed by Ministers or Barons

All principalities are governed by the prince with the aid of either ministers — who are appointed by his favor — or baronial lords, whose position is hereditary. In the former case, as for example 16th century Turkey, the prince will always have much more power than in the latter, as in the case of 16th century France.

Regimes with ministers, like Turkey, are difficult to conquer, and that is because the government is centralized under the despot — therefore that government is much more effective and efficient, and resources can be applied to military problems in a much more direct way. On the other hand, once such regimes are conquered, they're quite easy to hold. That's because those states are used to centralized control, and the only thing that has changed is the name and person of the leader. We might think of the example of the conquest of Darius's Persia by Alexander the Great in the classical period. Once the centralized regime of Persia was overthrown and a new figure placed at its head, there was very little in the way of resistance. Indeed, had his generals not fought amongst themselves after his death, Machiavelli suggests that they would have held Persia quite easily for an extended period.

It's an entirely different case when you're looking at something like 16th century France, where the prince does not have ministers but has hereditary barons as his advisors. Such regimes are, in fact, quite easy to conquer because they're decentralized, and it's easy to play the barons off against their hereditary monarch, as many of them think of that monarch as nothing more than the first among equals. We can think of the Fronde in 17th century France, and we can think of the circumstances that led to the rise of the Tudors in England. However, once conquered, such regimes are extremely difficult to hold, because the barons continue to retain their independent power base and are capable of sustained resistance and rebellion.

Free Cities and Republican City-States

Now here's where we turn to the last form of regime and its conquest: the question of free cities, by which Machiavelli means Republican city-states. And here we find, again, that expression of Machiavelli's true Republican sentiments.

Free cities are extremely difficult to conquer and hold because they have traditions of independence and liberty. And indeed, once acquired, the prince really has two choices. One, he can despoil them — that's what Rome did to Carthage: absolutely destroy them and raze them to the ground, and reside there himself. Or he can give the city autonomy under a friendly local elite and simply take tribute — this is what Rome did in Greece, and it's also what Sparta did to its allies.

Unfortunately, Machiavelli states, that latter policy of creating a local elite and extracting tribute almost always fails, and either the first strategy of simply despoiling the city or the second of moving there and ruling it directly become necessary. As Machiavelli states: "Whoever becomes the ruler of a free city and does not destroy it can expect to be destroyed by it, for it can always find a motive for rebellion in the name of liberty and of its ancient usages."

And here Machiavelli is gesturing at the remarkable civic virtue of Republican free cities, which is the source of their internal strength. And we'll see — time permitting, when we talk about military orders — that this is why he argues, in one way at least, that practically speaking, republics are the best forms of government. Precisely because people have a commitment to the public civic culture, they are essentially a large armed camp and are capable of conquering almost all of their rival states.

How Princes Rise to Power

Let's now look at the circumstances under which a prince will take power. In some cases, the prince will be a private citizen who rises to power either through his own efforts and abilities or through the fortune and efforts of others.

In the former case — when one has done it on one's own — such princes find it quite difficult to acquire new possessions because of the new rules they're forced to impose. The reformer has, as Machiavelli puts it, "enemies in all those who profit by the old order, and only lukewarm defenders in all those who would profit by the new order." Once obtained and reformed, however, these territories are easy to hold. He gives the example of Cyrus over the Medes — quite difficult to seize that power and create a new empire, but once accomplished, the rules of the game are redefined.

It is for these same reasons that those who come up with new orders really require military support. Perhaps the best example of this is prophets. Machiavelli says that "armed prophets are successful, while unarmed ones invariably fail," for as he puts it, "it is easy to persuade the people of a thing, but difficult to keep them in that persuasion." Moses and Muhammad were successful because they had military allies, which allowed them to enforce their new disciplines and obligations on their populations. His contemporary Savonarola was a failure because he did not have the military means to enforce his rule in Florence.

In the other case, we look at princes who become rulers either through luck or *fortuna*, or the efforts of others. They have an easy ascent to power, but a very tough time holding on to it — the exact inverse of those who rise to power through their own actions. That's because, having been placed in power by others, they depend on the goodwill of those benefactors, and are vulnerable if that goodwill

dries up or those benefactors die. The classic example here is Cesare Borgia, the son of Pope Alexander VI, who was dependent on his father in large part to become the Duke of Romagna. When his father died at an untimely moment, Cesare Borgia was not in a position to hold on to his power — it was that ill fortune which brought him down.

Princes Who Rise Through Villainy or Popular Support

Some princes rise to power through villainy, while others are elevated to that position by the support of their fellow citizens. Those who rise to power through villainy are advised by Machiavelli that it is prudent to commit all acts of cruelty at once and afterwards soften the rule.

He offers the remarkable example of Cesare Borgia, whom he considers a genius in his practice of political prudence — *virtù*. When he took the Romagna, Machiavelli writes:

It had previously been governed by weak rulers, who had rather despoiled their subjects than governed them, and given them more cause for disunion than for union, so that the province was a prey to robbery, assaults, and every kind of disorder. He therefore judged it necessary to give them a good government in order to make them peaceful and obedient to his rule. For this purpose, he appointed Messer Remirro de Orco, a cruel and able man, to whom he gave the fullest authority. This man in a short time was highly successful in rendering the country orderly and united. Whereupon the Duke — not deeming such excessive authority expedient, lest it should become hateful — appointed a civil court of justice in the center of the province under an excellent president, to which each city appointed its own advocate. As he knew that the harshness of the past had engendered

some amount of hatred, in order to purge the minds of the people and to win them over completely, he resolved to show that if any cruelty had taken place, it was not by his orders, but through the harsh disposition of his minister. And having found the opportunity, he had de Orco cut in half and placed one morning on the public square at Cesena with a piece of wood and a blood-stained knife by his side. The ferocity of this spectacle caused the people both satisfaction and amazement.

That may sound a rather ghoulish description of political practice, but it is in fact quite realistic, grounded in empirical observation of how power actually works.

A prince elevated to power by his fellow citizens, on the other hand, will need to play off the various factions of society — in 15th and 16th century Italy, that would have been the great people against the small, the nobles against the commoners. Either class will create a prince when it fears that the other is too strong. That's why princely powers are created within Republican free city-states: to restrain the other class, which each fears is encroaching on its privileges.

But as Machiavelli points out, it's harder to rule when one is elevated by the nobility, because they will always think of you as their equal and never as their superior. The people, on the other hand, are satisfied with your rule if you simply do not oppress them. So it is actually wiser to side with the people against the elite. But in either case, the prince should ultimately attempt to gain the favor of the people, protecting them against the nobles, who are his natural rivals. He should also make sure that the people always need him, and to do that he must ensure their social welfare and their military protection.

Military Orders

It is important to note that in addition to good laws, the basic foundation of any regime is good arms. It is the fact — and here we recur to republicanism — that in a republic, people feel a commitment to the public good. This is what Machiavelli believes makes republics great, but only if those republics have universal military conscription, as the Romans did, and as he argued the Italians should practice.

In any case, the ruler must study military arts as well as their historical practice. Looking at the question of the construction of an army: armies are either made of mercenaries, auxiliaries (which are forces of allies), or one's own nationally conscripted militia.

According to Machiavelli, and this is part of his notion of civic humanism, only the militia is a safe form of military force. Mercenaries are dangerous because they are disunited, faithless, ambitious, and, according to Machiavelli, cowardly. Consider the military leaders of mercenary armies: their captains are either incompetent — in which case they are useless — or, if they are competent, they're quite likely to be untrustworthy. If they are competent and win battles, they will begin to wonder whether they should be paid by you or simply replace you. And there is no reason they cannot do the latter. It is his argument that the use of mercenaries in Italy by the free city-states has led to its downfall and the incursions of what he considers the barbaric French.

The use of allies is equally dangerous, but for different reasons. If your allies win for you, then you are beholden to them and are, in a sense, their prisoner. One might think of the relationship between the United States and Great Britain and France in World War II. We were auxiliary forces in their struggle against Germany, and once having secured victory, we became a permanent military presence

within Europe. In 1956, when Great Britain and France marked out an independent foreign policy in the Suez Crisis, we used our geopolitical might to enforce their retreat from that position — literally telling them that after they had seized the Suez Canal, they would turn it back to Egypt and apologize, which they did. As Machiavelli puts it: "The greatest danger with mercenaries lies in their cowardice and reluctance to fight, but with auxiliaries, the danger lies in their courage."

The Virtues of the Prince

Now I want to turn to the question of what virtues a prince should have.

First, it is better for a prince to have the reputation for cheapness than to be too liberal or generous with his resources. Sumptuous display and the generosity necessary to gain a reputation for liberality will cause the prince to raise taxes, and Machiavelli argues that this sort of rapaciousness will incur the hatred of the people — the worst mistake a ruler can make. A reputation for miserliness may bring some disgrace, and you may not have the reputation of a grand prince, but it will never cause the hatred of your own people. Liberality, by contrast, will force the rapaciousness that results in both disgrace and hatred. As he puts it, "Niggardliness is one of those vices which will enable him — the prince — to reign."

Take another set of virtues: cruelty versus clemency, the latter being the distinctively Christian virtue. Machiavelli argues that it is sometimes better to show cruelty than clemency. If clemency leads to lawlessness, then cruelty will become necessary anyway. If one practices a sort of laissez-faire attitude toward the social order, in which law and order are not strictly enforced, it will ultimately result in chaos, which will force the ruler's hand toward some form of

military despotism. So one might as well practice cruelty from the outset in order to create social order, fealty, and the unity of society — all of which are necessary for a well-governed state.

Finally, and most famously, it is better to be feared than loved, for love is fickle while fear is constant.

Now, it is important to note that fear need not and should not bring hatred. Machiavelli never enjoins oppressing one's people so that they come to hate you. Hatred must always be avoided. The key to avoiding hatred when practicing cruelty and instilling fear is never to take the property of your citizens. And this, I think, was a deep and realistic insight into political society:

When he is obliged to take the life of anyone, let him do so when there is a proper justification and manifest reason for it. But above all, he must abstain from taking the property of others. For men forget more easily the death of their father than the loss of their patrimony.

And again, it's a classic Machiavellian doctrine, but in many ways quite realistic. If your father was executed in a political or military purge, that will certainly anger you, but there is nothing you can do to bring your father back. But if your estate is taken, there is quite a bit you can do to recover it, and that is probably something you will plan to do for the rest of your life.

Villainy, Glory, and the Limits of Ruthlessness

Many people who have given little careful study to Machiavelli assume that he is in fact enjoining a sort of utter ruthlessness at all costs. That is not actually the case. Machiavelli doesn't believe in the Christian virtues, but he does believe in classical virtues, and he does not ever enjoin villainy. What inspires the quest for political power is

the quest for greatness, and what inspires the quest for greatness is glory. And there is no glory in villainy.

So there is a real limit to what the prince can do. Those who would see Machiavelli as laying down the principles of a Hitler or a Stalin misread him. As he speaks of Agathocles, the famed tyrant of Sicily:

It cannot be called virtue to kill one's fellow citizens, betray one's friends, be without faith, without pity, and without religion. By these methods one may indeed gain power, but not glory. For if the virtues of Agathocles in braving and overcoming perils, and his greatness of soul in supporting and surmounting obstacles, be considered, one sees no reason for holding him inferior to any of the most renowned captains. Nevertheless, his barbarous cruelty and inhumanity, together with his countless atrocities, do not permit of his being named among the most famous men. We cannot attribute to fortune or virtue that which he achieved without either.

So the practice of ruthlessness in politics is limited by the attempt to avoid outright villainy, in order for the great political hero — the great man — to achieve immortal glory. And that raises again that Renaissance humanist theme of the man-centered interpretation of the world, where one strives for immortality in the annals of history rather than through salvific sacrifice.

Reputation, Deception, and the Art of Appearing Virtuous

The prince should also have the reputation for honesty, integrity, and religion — but not necessarily the reality of these things. It is good to have the reputation of being a religious man, but actually being so at all times is an impediment to the prince's practice. It is good to have the reputation for being a truth-teller, but to always tell the truth in

fact is not always prudent. The prince must use both noble force and deceitful cunning when appropriate. In that way, he is both like the fox — a cagey, wily animal — as well as the lion, that brave beast of conquest.

The prince must have the reputation for keeping faith, but must do so only when it is in his interest. Here again Machiavelli extols the remarkable example of Alexander VI, the great father of Cesare Borgia and himself a pope:

Alexander VI did nothing else but deceive men. He thought of nothing else and found the occasion for it. No man was ever able to give assurances or affirm things with stronger oaths, and no man observed them less. However, he always succeeded in his deceptions, as he well knew this aspect of things.

Therefore:

It is not necessary for a prince to have all the above-named qualities, but it is very necessary to seem to have them. I would even be so bold as to say that to possess them and always to observe them is dangerous, but to appear to possess them is useful. Thus it is well to seem merciful, faithful, humane, sincere, religious, and also to be so — but you must have the mind so disposed that when it is needful to be otherwise, you may be able to change to the opposite qualities.

Now, in our public rhetoric we rarely accept such convictions openly. But when we look at the practice of actual power, we often do implicitly agree with such practices. Franklin Roosevelt is largely heralded as a great president for routinely violating the Neutrality Acts and engaging in a private foreign policy which turned out in the long run to have been right. And I don't think most informed Americans felt that Dwight David Eisenhower's decision to lie about having sent a U-2 spy plane over the Soviet Union destroyed his credibility as a leader — it was certainly an embarrassment when

discovered, but it was widely understood as a necessary act of statecraft.

So what are we suggesting? Ultimately, what makes the prince a great man and a world-historical figure is that he is one of the few in a position where the ends of his actions always justify the means. As Machiavelli states:

In the actions of men, and especially of princes, from which there is no appeal, the end justifies the means. Let a prince therefore aim at conquering and maintaining the state, and the means will always be judged honorable and praised by everyone, for the vulgar is always taken by appearances and the issue of the event. And the world consists only of the vulgar, and the few who are not vulgar are isolated when the many have a rallying point in the prince.

Conclusion

In conclusion, there are several problems raised by Machiavelli which will become the subject of subsequent political philosophy and theory: the relationship of "is" and "ought," of realism versus idealism, and the relationship between political science and political philosophy.

Nonetheless, Machiavelli's work is critical in establishing the parameters of that tradition, and indeed has influence far beyond it. He created a new discipline from philosophy: that of political science. And the mark of modern philosophy is precisely that practice of the scientific method. Just as Newton's natural philosophy of mechanics became a new discipline — called science, where before it had been called natural philosophy — so too Machiavelli's rigorous empirical analysis of power transformed political philosophy into political science.

All of this trajectory of thought begins in the Renaissance, and no figure is more representative of its southern phase than Niccolò Machiavelli.

Lecture 27: More's Utopianism

Professor Darren Staloff

Introduction

In our last lecture, we examined the political thought of Niccolò Machiavelli, a representative figure of the Italian or Southern Renaissance. In this lecture, we'll turn to Thomas More, an equally representative figure of the Northern Renaissance.

In many ways, he is also a stereotype of what we mean by a Renaissance man — a man who had many different talents and abilities. More was a man of great learning, an elegant writer of Latin prose, a student of classical Greek and the philosophical writings of the ancient world. He was an important member of the circle of Northern Renaissance figures associated with his close friend Erasmus of Rotterdam. He was also a member of Parliament in England, had served in various diplomatic posts for the English government and in other administrative posts, ultimately becoming Lord Chancellor of all England. And, of course, he was a Christian saint, known for his great piety and integrity. Those of you who have seen *A Man for All Seasons* know that he was ultimately beheaded for his refusal to acknowledge Henry VIII's divorce from Catherine of Aragon, as well as Henry VIII's supremacy over the English Church.

He was also a man of great wit and jest, and I would argue that this is actually critical to understanding much of the strategy of *Utopia*, as we will see in a moment. But I think it's probably more important to begin with this insight: what More does with *Utopia*, and what differentiates it from, say, the *Prince* — and what differentiates the Northern Renaissance from the Southern — is that while both represent a rebirth of classical learning and humanism, there is much

greater tension between that classical tradition in the South and Christianity than there is in the North. The Northern Renaissance is often an attempt to wed the Christian ethos — particularly Jesus's gospel of love and the moral philosophy we find in, for example, the Beatitudes — with the wisdom of the ancient world.

Utopia as Social Critique and Precursor to Communism

Utopia is also famous, and justly so, as a precursor of modern communism. While its communism is not meant entirely literally, to argue that it is entirely a metaphor is equally to go too far. The most obvious source for More's *Utopia* is Plato's *Republic*, on which it is clearly modeled.

And that is why I mention the question of jest and wit, because More finds himself facing the exact same problem that Socrates faced: how does one speak truth to power, particularly in a society which does not have a tradition of freedom of speech and dissent?

You will remember that Socrates did this by deploying irony. Socrates would critique the social conventions of Athenian democracy, but then ultimately retreat behind that critique by saying, "But of course, I'm not saying it's wrong. I don't know anything. I'm simply raising questions." And that worked for a while, until it got annoying and they fed him some hemlock. More tried the technique of jest and wit as a way of shielding himself from censure. This is important, because you'll recall that More was not executed for anything he said, but for what he didn't say and what he was thought to have believed.

So he uses jest in *Utopia* to shield himself. The text is originally written in Latin, and almost all of the proper names in *Utopia* are

comic — indeed, in an extremely silly and robust fashion — so that he could claim, if the doctrines were taken to be censurable, that of course they are censurable: it is a joke book, not to be taken seriously. For example, the name *Utopia* literally means "no place." The Socratic figure or hero of the text, Raphael, has the surname Hythlodaeus, meaning "dispenser of nonsense" or "nonsense talker." The basic unit of political organization in *Utopia* is translated from the Latin as a "sty" — and the people who live in them are, well, obviously the animals that live in sties.

This is obviously an attempt at buffoonery and raillery, but it is also a practice of esotericism. Those in his audience who had read Plato's *Republic* would know that in calling the basic unit a sty, he is also referring to Plato's "city of swine" in the *Republic* — the city built in speech where justice takes care of itself. And again, we will see that this is a communistic arrangement.

So, given its veneer of comic buffoonery, More hopes that *Utopia* is a safe venue in which to vent his criticisms of the prevailing social and political orders.

Book One: Setting the Stage

Again like the *Republic*, More's *Utopia* takes the form of a dialogue led by a Socratic wise man. In this case his name is Raphael Hythlodaeus — a world traveler who has seen many things and knows many things. In theory, he has traveled with Amerigo Vespucci and discovered the wonderful island of Utopia somewhere off the coast of what we now know as Florida. And again like the *Republic*, the first book of *Utopia* sets the stage and issues for the second book, which is an exposition of the communal, social, and political arrangements of the Utopians that Raphael observed in his travels.

Briefly put, in Book One, More meets Raphael in Antwerp during an ambassadorial tour, is struck by his obvious knowledge and wisdom, and they enter into a discussion of politics. Raphael recounts his visit to England, where he spent time at the court of Cardinal John Morton — who was in fact a patron of More's — in which he critiqued English social and political practices, especially the mass use of the death penalty against property criminals. Raphael points out that it is not only absurd to execute people for property crimes — since you are thereby encouraging them to commit murder as well — but it is obviously not going to deter people who have to feed starving children.

This leads ultimately to his invocation of the Utopian example, where things work better because there is communism. He argues that when you get rid of private property, you get rid of crime, you get rid of property disputes, and you create equality and social justice. And More responds — I quote: "I disagree. I don't believe you'd ever have a reasonable standard of living under a communistic system. There'd always tend to be shortages because no one would work hard enough. In the absence of a profit motive, everyone would become lazy and rely on everyone else to do the work for him."

More is thus putting forward a very realistic critique, one that has certainly resonated over the centuries. And that is precisely what allows Raphael to make the case for Utopianism in the second book when he says: "You're bound to take that view, for you simply can't imagine what it would be like — not accurately, at any rate. But if you'd been with me in Utopia and seen it all for yourself, as I did — I lived there for more than five years, and the only reason I ever left was that I wanted to tell people about the new world — you'd be the first to admit that you've never seen a country so well organized." And that brings us to Book Two.

Book Two: The Organization of Utopian Society

Book Two addresses three big issues: the arrangement of society, the arrangement of the government, and Utopian high culture and basic beliefs. It is Book Two which makes up the core of the work. I want briefly to note, however, that while *Utopia* literally means "no place," it has obviously intentional similarities to England. Like England, it is an island separated from the mainland by a small channel. Like England, it has a central capital much like London, and it has exactly 54 towns — the number More counted in England in his own time.

Let's turn to the organization of Utopian society. Everything, of course, as I've mentioned, is owned by the community. The household is the locus of production, and this is important to keep in mind, because prior to the 19th century, the household was not only the place where children were raised and educated — it was also the place where almost everyone worked. If you wanted to learn a trade, and your father was a carpenter but you wanted to be a blacksmith, you would find a blacksmith who would take you on as an apprentice, and you would move into his household and become a member of his family. That same set of arrangements is found in the *Utopia*: the basic unit of society is the household, which is both reproductive and productive.

Trades are assigned on the basis of aptitude as well as personal choice. There is one exception in that household mode of production, and that is agricultural labor, which More felt was extremely undesirable. To that end, the Utopians institute a form of conscription or draft. All people are required for two years of their life to serve as agricultural laborers, and they are rotated through this duty. If additional labor is needed at harvest time, it is supplied by slaves — and we will talk about slavery time permitting.

Since everyone works in Utopia, there are no nobles, no lords, no rentiers. And since everyone labors, the workday is actually only six hours long, with a fairly long break in the middle — because Utopians treasure leisure over possessions. Now, let me point out that leisure in Utopia is not idleness. One does not simply sit at home when not working and daydream. Leisure time is spent either studying music, or attending public lectures on philosophy, science, astronomy, ethics, and religion, or it can be spent on hobbies such as gardening — Utopians love gardening, much as the English do, an obvious reference. If you don't have a hobby, then you must spend your spare time doing additional labor at home. And if you choose to do that, you are respected for it — seen as a sort of hero of the community, sacrificing for the good of all.

There are some fairly uniform arrangements for household life. Everyone goes to bed at exactly eight o'clock. Everyone sleeps for at least eight hours. There is very little in the way of privacy. Houses have no locks, and doors are never kept intentionally closed to keep other people out. Indeed, if you wish to travel from one town to another, you need a permit from the local authorities, which will then require you — if you spend more than two days on your travels — to work and practice your occupation in the town you are visiting.

There are other sorts of work which Utopian citizens do not do — namely, what we might call dirty work. Perhaps the best example is the butchering of animals. More had Utopians refrain from butchering because he felt that it desensitized people to cruelty. So Utopian citizens are barred from butchering, and again this labor is performed by slaves.

The household is also intensely patriarchal, much like the contemporary European household — which is to say, the eldest male, in a gerontocratic arrangement, is the head of the household. A household usually includes somewhere between 10 to 16 adults

and all attendant children. There is a practice of monthly auricular confession: children confess their sins to their parents, and wives confess their sins to their husbands. Although marriage is based on love, and since there is no property to speak of, marriage matches are not arranged — nonetheless, adultery and fornication are serious crimes, sometimes punished by enslavement.

All houses are maintained publicly — they are public property — and they are all roughly identical, as is clothing. People wear homespun uniforms. Indeed, to make sure people don't form an attachment to the houses they are living in, everybody moves out and switches houses every ten years.

Finally, food is generally consumed at public dining halls. This is not mandated, but the food there is so good that one would be foolish to eat at home. And again, the same gerontocratic patriarchal relations are mirrored in that setting: the old eat first and get the pick of the choicest foods, while the young wait on them at table. Dinner is accompanied by light moral and philosophical discussion, poetry, and music — again, all supervised by the elders.

The Government of Utopia

Those are the social arrangements of the *Utopia*, and we might see real similarities between them and the social arrangements of the *Republic*, as well as what the *Republic* is partly based on — Sparta. Let's look now at the government.

The most basic unit of Utopian government, as I have mentioned, is the sty, which is made up of 30 households. These 30 households elect a sty warden. And for every ten sty wardens, there is a "bench-eater," also known as a senior district counselor. All of these local offices are elective, and they are held for one-year terms. But the sty wardens — and there are 200 of them per town — elect the mayor.

The mayor serves for life unless he is impeached for malfeasance, incompetence, or crime.

Now, in all Utopian political arrangements, there are a couple of interesting regulations regarding deliberation. First, there are no political discussions allowed outside of the council chambers. If you cannot discuss political issues off the floor — if you cannot cut a deal in the cloakroom, as it were — that arrangement is clearly meant to forestall faction and political negotiation. You are forced to speak and vote simply on the basis of the merits of the case. Similarly, no legislation can be discussed on the day it is introduced, an attempt to forestall passionate responses and produce more rational deliberation. This does in some way mirror the arrangements of the English Parliament, where every bill must be read three different times and passed three different times before it is moved on to the next chamber.

As for the overall structure of Utopian government, it is a centralized administration: the towns elect delegates to a national parliament, which is headed by a prince who is elected but serves for life. This national parliament's primary functions are really three. The first is to allocate goods and labor in times of shortage — to obtain constant and accurate information about where the harvest is going well and where there are food shortages, so that extra labor and resources can be distributed rationally. Its second goal is to set foreign policy. And closely allied with that is the third function: the dispatch of colonists — a policy that the ancient Greeks practiced, that the ancient Romans practiced, and that before too long the English would practice in the New World.

I mention this because it is remarkable what is *not* included on that list, which is to say the national parliament does not legislate. It does not pass laws. And this is for that old-fashioned Platonic reason: that if you don't have private property, you really don't need legislation.

You can simply use equity, common sense, and right reason to govern a society. The notion is that if you do in fact need legislation, your society is unjust, and no amount of laws will ever fix it. And that is an argument we saw in the *Republic* as well.

Nonetheless, there are perverse figures who, despite communism, will attempt to steal communal property. They are enslaved, as are prisoners captured in war — and actually also volunteers: people who are foreigners and show up asking to be enslaved. That may seem strange, except when you recall that Utopians only work six hours a day. The slaves really don't work much more than that, and they are certainly better kept than most citizens and peasants anywhere else in the world. Only recalcitrant criminals are executed. If slaves show true repentance and labor for the good of the community, they are released from their fetters — which are, by the way, made of gold — and given all the privileges and rights of full Utopian citizens. The goal is rehabilitation.

Finally, it's worth noting the Platonic aspect of the governors — which is to say that those who hold the highest political offices are very much, as in the *Republic*, philosopher-kings. You cannot actually be elected to the national parliament or made prince unless you are part of the class of scholarly intellectuals. To enter that class, you must show merit through testing, and there is real social mobility into it. If you are trained as a carpenter, for example, but attend public lectures on astronomy, find it fascinating, and display a real aptitude for it, you are allowed to switch your vocation. Indeed, one can become and remain an intellectual as long as one's high cultural work — one's scientific and humanistic researches — is satisfactory. Within that class of intellectuals, there are exactly three different vocations: teachers, who give the public lectures and train future scholars; priests, since only intellectuals can be priests; and the rulers

themselves, who, though popularly elected, are chosen from that intellectual elite.

Trade, Commerce, and the Uses of Precious Metals

Let's turn to the discussion of trade and commerce, which the Utopians engage in quite extensively, much like the English. They do so primarily to procure iron, which they consider the only truly useful metal — again, a very clear allusion to England, which also engaged in trade to procure iron, which it lacked in large quantities. They do acquire precious metals nonetheless — gold and silver — but these are used only for further trade, because foreign nations find them useful, and particularly for bribery abroad, since gold and silver have no use-value within Utopian society.

So they use surplus gold as fetters for slaves, as chamber pots and spittoons, and they give gold jewelry to children as one would give them rattles and baubles, so that they can enjoy them until they are about three or four years old and then realize how childish they really are.

War and Foreign Policy

That brings us to the final part of the political arrangements: the practice of war and foreign policy. Utopians fight wars for only three reasons. First, to defend their own territories and citizens — essentially defensive projects. Second, they will defend the territory and citizens of an ally. And third — and here we get again that heavy Christian element — to liberate oppressed peoples.

Again, like in Plato's *Republic*, they sign no treaties with their allies. Their rationale is as follows: if their allies are reasonable and equitable people, they don't need a treaty, because they know those

allies will be obliged to follow right reason and do what is right. If, however, their allies are Machiavellian in their nature, then it is pointless to sign treaties — they will break them whenever it is in their interest. So treaty-making is not part of Utopian foreign policy.

But they are nonetheless capable of real deviousness, particularly when it comes to fighting wars, and that is because their primary goal once engaged in a war is to save as many Utopian lives as possible. So what they will do, if Nation X declares war on Utopia, is immediately send spies into Nation X and post in every market square large notices saying "wanted, dead or alive," listing all of the military and political leaders of Nation X. Because they stockpile gold and have no other real use for it, they can pay immense rewards. And not surprisingly, there is almost nothing people will not do for gold and silver, so they generally do not even have to fight wars when enemies declare them — because the citizens of the enemy country simply bring in the leaders themselves, and the Utopians always pay as promised.

If that doesn't work, they are more than happy to buy off the opposing army when they meet it in the field, saying to the opposing general: whatever your leaders are paying you, we will double or triple it — and they always keep their word on that.

If that also fails, their next line of defense is to use mercenaries whenever possible. In their case, they use a group called the Venalians, who are clearly modeled on the Swiss — the great mercenaries of Renaissance Europe. Their practice is to pay the Venalians quite well and to put them in the line of fire and danger as quickly and as often as possible, so that as many of them will die as possible, because they consider any people who think warfare is a respectable full-time vocation to be barbarians and dangerous to the human species.

No Utopians are ever required to fight abroad, but they are all required to defend Utopia in defensive wars. Indeed, even the women are trained for combat, and if they choose, they are more than welcome to accompany their husbands and fight at the front. At the cessation of hostilities, Utopians exact reparations not from their allies whom they have helped, but from the defeated aggressor. And they leave the spoils of war to their allies to ensure they will always have trusted supporters. They also — quite in contrast to contemporary European practice — give quarter and aid to all non-combatants of the states they have conquered, never attacking anyone but the opposing army.

Utopian Culture: Religion and Ecumenism

Let's talk about Utopian culture, which is clearly an attempt to combine the very best of the ancient classical tradition with the Christian goals of equality and faith.

The first thing to note is that Utopian religion is intensely ecumenical. It is a set policy to ensure that religious practice is broad enough not to produce sectarian differences. All cathedrals are kept dark so that people will be placed in a contemplative mood. Prayers are always non-sectarian — always general enough that almost any interpretation of religion will allow one, in good conscience, to embrace them. There are no images in houses of worship, because each Utopian is encouraged to imagine God as he or she chooses.

Their priests are scholars, as I have mentioned, and are not required to be celibate — they can marry if they wish. All Utopians and all priests are encouraged to believe in one God. That, and the belief in human immortality and in punishment and reward in the afterlife — that is, heaven and hell — are the only doctrines of Utopian religion. Indeed, Utopian society demands religious toleration as a set policy.

Even atheists and materialists are tolerated, though it is worth noting they are not allowed to speak publicly and advocate their position, and they cannot vote or hold office as long as they reject the belief in one God and the immortality of the soul. That is because the Utopians believe that those who lack these beliefs have no metaphysical basis for genuine moral convictions. Nonetheless, such atheists are encouraged to dispute with priests, in the hope that those priests will eventually recover them from their errors.

Their priests, quite contrary to what one would find in Christianity but quite in keeping with Utopian values, counsel euthanasia for the diseased and bedridden. But it is not prescribed or enforced, and there is no stigma attached to remaining alive in a publicly maintained hospital. If you do choose to end your life and stop being a burden on society, you are celebrated as a hero. Raphael also recounts that the Utopians were extremely avid to hear about Christianity when it was introduced to them, and it immediately struck them that what Jesus preached was, in fact, the exact truth which they had already been practicing in Utopian society.

Utopian Moral Theory: Eudaimonism

Let's talk about Utopian moral theory. Here is where the heavy Greek influence comes in, because Utopian moral philosophy is eudaimonistic — happiness-oriented. Raphael claims to have gently chided the Utopians by saying that their eudaimonism veers a bit too much towards hedonism, in that they think happiness consists largely in pleasure. This is supported by their religion, because they believe that God made each person to be happy. And they supplement their moral theory with religion, because they believe that reason on its own — though important in establishing the foundations of religion — is ultimately insufficient.

Their first principle in establishing their morality is that the immortal soul, which God made, is made to be happy. Therefore God punishes and rewards us in the afterlife for our actions in producing our own happiness and contributing to the happiness of others. This leads to the conclusion that God himself believes that pleasure is good. And if it is good for me, then it must be good for you, and if it is good for us, it must be good for everyone — which means we can deduce that we should have no pleasure that comes at the expense of others.

In fact, the Utopians develop several arguments to the effect that selfless pleasure — that is, giving pleasure to others — is itself a profound source of personal pleasure. Such acts of kindness are often repaid, and therefore giving pleasure to someone else creates a reasonable expectation of pleasures returned. But secondly, there is an intense personal satisfaction and fulfillment that comes from giving pleasure to others and contributing to their happiness. And finally, there is the eternal reward that we receive from God for being good and contributing to the happiness and well-being of our fellow creatures. Thus happiness is the goal of human endeavor, even of virtuous action.

Now, what exactly do the Utopians mean by pleasure? They define it as any naturally enjoyable state. Keep in mind, this is a hedonism much like that of Epicurus, not like that of Caligula or Nero. That is to say, pleasures do not include things like wearing fine clothing, keeping up with the Joneses, gambling, or hunting — all of which ultimately create more pain than pleasure. It obviously does not include excesses of food or alcohol, all of which cause pain. And anything which causes pain to someone else is obviously not a pleasure at all.

The Utopians recognize two sorts of pleasure: mental and physical. Physical pleasures they consider lower. The highest pleasures — the

greatest pleasures — are those associated with the contemplation of eternal truth and the realization of a life well lived.

Conclusion

And it is at that point that I would like to conclude this lecture, because it is in precisely this way that More wants to argue one can take the eudaimonism of the ancient Greeks and wed it to the ethos of Christ. As he writes:

I have no doubt that either self-interest or the authority of our Savior Christ — who was far too wise not to know what was best for us, and far too kind to recommend anything else — would have led the whole world to adopt the Utopian system long ago, if it weren't for that beastly root of all evil: pride. For pride's criterion of prosperity is not what you've got yourself, but what other people haven't got.

Lecture 28: Erasmus Against Enthusiasm

Professor Jeremy Adams

Introduction: The Outstanding Christian Humanist

Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam, born, we think, in 1469 and dying in 1536, was the outstanding Christian humanist of the Northern Renaissance — a model of disciplined scholarship, of literary elegance, of refined friendship, and of severe and sincere personal Christian piety. He was also a model of a tolerant awareness of the need to avoid conflict in resolving issues which are as likely to wound spirits as they are to shed blood, and much more likely to do either of those than to find and establish truth.

He spent his life fighting ignorance and superstition, but he came to find enthusiasm almost as dangerous. And in this discovery lies a great part of Erasmus' significance for our own age.

Life and Formation

Erasmus' life was itself a kind of model of humanistic discipline. He was the illegitimate son of a rural priest, who overcame the embarrassment of his origins by a youth of self-restraint and deep study. His mother was the daughter of a physician — an entirely respectable family — and his uncle took care to provide Erasmus with the basic ingredients of a decent education.

Erasmus studied at an Augustinian monastery in Holland, whose community he joined as a novice, and then left before taking final vows. He went on to Paris, to the Collège de Montaigu of the University of Paris, but he never graduated. He deeply disliked the scholastic rigidity, the puritanical discipline, and the miserably bad

food of his Parisian collège — not a very French thing, he said. Later on, he praised the French for the natural intelligence of their women, for their superior food, and for other qualities that seemed to him appropriate to an educated Christian people.

Going beyond his teachers and the courses of study they offered him, Erasmus perfected Petrarch's style of Latin prose and became the first West European competent enough in Greek to edit the Greek New Testament. Because of that remarkable skill, he was appointed the first Regius Professor of Greek — the first Royal Professor of Greek — at Cambridge University, and was apparently the only man teaching Greek in England for some years.

His reputation as a man of letters was unsurpassed in Western Europe during his lifetime. He was in that sense the heir of Bernard of Clairvaux in the 12th century and the forerunner of Voltaire in the 18th. His complete published works contain some 16 million words in 150 volumes of moderate size. Practically everybody of importance and intellectual pretension in his time wanted to know what Erasmus thought about theology, about church reform, about classical literature, about current affairs, and about many less serious matters as well. Erasmus's collected correspondence contains thousands of letters, and much more information about this kind of exchange — this kind of public communication at the top level of the European elite — comes from the dedications and forewords to Erasmus's numerous books and pamphlets.

Erasmus and the Printing Press

In a way, the most striking — or at any rate, the most distinctive — note about his role as an arbiter of letters for his age is his fascination with technology: the technology of learning, to wit, in his time, the printing press. Erasmus was born a quarter century after

Gutenberg commenced in Mainz to change forever the instruments of learning and communication over distance and time — instruments that had fixed the limits of intellectual intercourse for humans for more than four millennia. Erasmus loved the smell and feel of printer's ink, the human interaction of the printer's shop, as well as the crunching of metal type on paper and the whole process of illustrating, binding, and distributing the precious books which were his life. Perhaps more than any of his contemporaries or immediate predecessors, Erasmus understood what printing could do to change the world he knew.

Erasmus never needed to accept any of the many posts he was offered. He may be the first person in history to have made a good living entirely from his writing — always in Latin, his first language, almost his mother tongue. He rarely, if ever, wrote in Dutch. We have indications that he may have written some letters in Dutch, but he took care to ensure that none of his Dutch writing survived. Latin was truly his mother tongue, and the living he made from it was a good living in the most acceptable sense of the term. He remained monastic in his distaste for gluttony, drunkenness, and self-indulgence in general, but he thought decent food was essential to his health, and he liked good wine. There are wonderful stories about the mules he hired to carry his baggage across the Alps and along the long roads of Europe during his endless crisscrossing of that continent — the particular sound he emitted being the clink, clink, clink of bottles of very fine vintages attached to the baskets on their backs.

Erasmus' Literary Output

Erasmus wrote copiously in several genres. First of all, there were formal letters — thousands of them — always a favorite literary form

of the Renaissance movement. He also wrote model conversations to improve one's Latin. He wrote treatises on a wide range of topics, including biblical criticism, church reform, Christian ethics, and Christian theology. And he also wrote satire.

The most bitter of his satires is called *Julius Exclusus* — or *The Exclusion of Pope Julius* — which he wrote in 1513 about Pope Julius II, who had reigned as Vicar of Peter from 1503 to 1513. This is a particularly bitter satire because Giulio della Rovere, who took his own given name as pope — calling himself Julius II, a most unusual thing for popes to do, which shocked a good number of people at the time and which seemed an omen of the way Julius would conduct his papacy — had been an early hero of Erasmus. He was a vital and vigorous man who went overboard in his desire to save the papal state and church liberty from secular control. And so his enthusiasm for this laudable goal undid him and made him, in Erasmus' view, a horrible and shocking example of the abuse of a tradition. This satire was written after Julius' death, to be sure, but it got Erasmus into considerable trouble, because to attack any pope was to attack all popes in the minds of those who still controlled the machinery of repression in Western European Christian society.

The Praise of Folly

Perhaps the most readable of Erasmus' works today is a gentler satire, though a very mysterious and confusing one: *The Praise of Folly*, called *Encomium Moriae* in its original, punning Latin title. It was dedicated to Erasmus' good friend Thomas More, whose company and household he enjoyed for long stretches while he was in England. More was a man who loved a good joke, and the name "More" in English is of course rather like the Greek word *moros*, meaning "fool" — as in "sophomore" — and *moria*, meaning "folly,"

whose encomium Erasmus wrote, dedicating it to More in the hope that he would enjoy the complicated, multi-level joke involved.

Its reception throughout Europe in the years after 1511 — it was reprinted over and over again, not only with Erasmus' approval but, this being before the age of copyrights, with much more enthusiasm than Erasmus found comfortable as time went on — made Erasmus the Voltaire of his time. And he is much more like Voltaire, I think, than like Bernard of Clairvaux. Like Bernard of Clairvaux, he had a monastic taste and a great appreciation for classical rhetoric and for the Fathers of the Church. But like Voltaire, he had a biting wit which could cut right to the point of any matter.

The central character of this remarkable work is Folly herself, who preaches a sermon — on folly, on herself. It is a highly complex and elusive satire, which has given rise to wildly different interpretations. As great a scholar as Roland Bainton almost dismisses it as a literary exercise done for Erasmus' diversion, which became a source of embarrassment that he later rejected. Most critics see *The Praise of Folly* as much more than that. Here is how it goes.

Folly mounts a platform — we don't know whether it is a pulpit or simply some kind of speaker's platform, perhaps a schoolroom setting — and she announces that she is going to speak extempore. She is wearing a jester's cap and bells. You shouldn't take too seriously anything she says. In fact, her extempore speaking is very impressive, because she speaks with all the conventions of the most sophisticated rhetorical traditions — all the distinctions and devices, all the subtle turns of phrase, and so on.

She mocks, first of all, marriage and procreation. If anybody really knew what was involved in raising children, they would never let their enthusiasm for a partner of the other sex lead them that far. She then mocks excessive candor — the insufferable honesty which leads

some people to become unendurable to their neighbors and their society. Better to be happily seated in Plato's Cave watching illusions, Erasmus says, than to be one of those enlightened souls who are brought up to see the sun. Can he have meant that? One doubts that he possibly can have.

Folly then mocks scholars who wear out their eyes and the rest of their constitution years before their time reading obscure texts — just as Erasmus himself had done, though he doesn't say so there explicitly. But then she mocks class-conscious foolishness, and she mocks the folly of scholastic theologians who get all tied up in splitting hairs about nominalism, realism, conceptualism, and all the rest. She mocks monks — hypocritical monks, not true monks. She mocks kings and nobles who neglect their people, and scholars with their obscurantist footnotes — and here he does say it in so many words — scholars who cover texts with footnotes that obscure rather than reveal what the text is all about. Folly mocks with particular sharpness theologians who justify wars, who justify the shedding of blood, using the doctrine of the just war developed by Augustine, Aquinas, and others to make respectable the tawdry territorial grabs of popes like Julius II.

Finally, to considerable surprise on the part of the reader, Folly becomes the foolishness of the cross. The great anomaly of Erasmus' *Folly* is that she herself berates the fools, and that at last she turns out to be the fool in Christ — the one who appears foolish to those who would deem themselves wise in this world. Every human commitment is brought under the gaze of Folly's remarkably skillful rhetorical tirade.

God cannot commit excess, so the Incarnation and Crucifixion are not folly, however extreme and incomprehensible they may seem to us. But every other human commitment, however good essentially, may be rendered foolish — and worse — by going overboard.

Enthusiasm is an apparent virtue to be dreaded, this satire of Erasmus teaches us — or at least, it is a human virtue to be treated with great caution.

Erasmus' Distrust of Enthusiasm

Erasmus' distrust of enthusiasm was central to his thought and his literary output. Throughout his work, Erasmus attacked superstition, which reached a climax in the cult of saints and of going on pilgrimage. Instead of the piety of pilgrimages to the shrines of saints — many of whose historical authenticity was deeply dubious, he said — and instead of the frenzied acquisition of indulgences, which reached a climax in the early 16th century thanks to the fiscal requirements of a worldly papacy, either fighting wars like Julius II or building the huge monument of St. Peter's Basilica like his successor Leo X, what contemporary Christians needed to cultivate, Erasmus said and wrote over and over, was the *Philosophia Christi* — the philosophy of Christ — by which he meant the life of the Gospels, as much as or perhaps rather than any formal doctrines.

Along with the *Philosophia Christi*, Erasmus had no hesitation in combining what he saw as the best in pre-Christian classicism — the purest element, in his eyes, of Greco-Roman philosophical thought and behavior. He referred constantly to the example and the philosophy of Christ and Socrates together. Socrates, though certainly no Christ, certainly no incarnate God, was for Erasmus more than the father of philosophy — he was a pre-Christian martyr to truth, almost a Greek John the Baptist.

A typical expression of Erasmus' engagement with classical education and the classical legacy is the treatise *The Education of a Christian Prince*, which he wrote and had published in 1515, dedicating it to the young Archduke Charles of Austria, the Habsburg prince

expected to become Holy Roman Emperor. Erasmus had been appointed one of his counselors with a very nice stipend, and so he wrote this book of counsel to his possible future sovereign, to whom he felt a clear and appropriate debt. In it, Erasmus says: get educated by reading Plutarch, Seneca, Cicero, and above all Plato — authors who, with perhaps the exception of Plato, urged on their followers the wisdom of the golden mean, of restraint, of classical rejection of excess. He also urged the prince and his educators to avoid any nonsense about Arthur and Lancelot — tragic instances, he felt, of what uncritical enthusiasm can lead one to.

Erasmus and Luther

When Martin Luther first attacked the indulgence trade in 1517 and took to task the worldly popes whom Erasmus had been attacking, Erasmus was strongly in favor of his protest. He also supported Luther's attack on the general corruption of the papacy and his insistence on reading the Bible directly rather than listening to scholastic interpretations of scriptural doctrine. But when Luther declared that the rule to follow in judging one's own Christian faith was *sola scriptura* — by Scripture alone — Erasmus hesitated and held back. For Erasmus, tradition was, if not as important as Scripture, certainly important as well and essential to the complete message of Christianity as he understood it. And this was a tradition which had been based upon the classical legacy and classical thinking and classical models of behavior, as well as upon Hebrew biblical ones.

When Luther developed a stringent interpretation of the doctrine of predestination in 1521 — in the third of his three famous treatises that shattered the intellectual peaks of Christendom — a doctrine which denied any role to the freedom of the human will, Erasmus

simply had to part ways with him. For Luther, the corollary that the human will had no real freedom was one which he, first, denied, and second, was not particularly troubled by. It simply wasn't true, as far as he was concerned — of course the will was free. When people pressed him, as Erasmus did in letter after letter over the next three years, to explain how this was logically possible given his predestination argument, Luther first showed irritation and then considerable annoyance.

In 1521 — exactly a decade after he published *The Praise of Folly* — Erasmus began this correspondence with Luther. Luther's literary style was always powerful and could be corrosive in disagreement. As the exchange progressed, Luther became verbally abusive, even grossly vulgar. By 1524, Erasmus had definitively and finally broken with Luther. The instinctive humanist that Erasmus was remained determined to find some place in the process of salvation for the free choice of humans to cooperate with God's grace. He could not stand the notion that God was a tyrant — cruel if somehow arguably just — predestining some to eternal torment and some to eternal bliss. Here was another case of a good man and a good doctrine led astray by what Erasmus saw as enthusiasm.

The Many Faces of Enthusiasm

Everywhere he looked, Erasmus could discern examples of the fatal seduction of enthusiasm. Early on, he had begun to warn against the enthusiasm of simple believers for the saints of the Church, which led them to an idolatrous and sometimes financially ruinous cult of relics and pilgrimages. He had a great deal of fun making sport of the cults of Saint Barbara and Saint Eustace — both of them extremely dubious historically — which reminded him of the cults of pagans attached to this god and that demigoddess, attacking one another in

the process. Certainly the cult of the saints should have brought all Christians together toward the foot of the throne of God. Instead, this particular kind of enthusiastic devotion to one or another celestial patron had brought Christians into a kind of conflict that was deeply dissatisfying and deeply inappropriate.

Then Erasmus was struck, a little later in his work, by the enthusiasm of lovers of classical literature for every object and every aspect of their study. Erasmus himself adored classical literature. He loved Latin to the point that he genuinely tried to make it even more effectively the medium of communication for everybody in Western Europe. Latin had been the medium of communication for the educated, for the upper classes, and for the rich — whether educated or not — who would certainly have secretaries capable of writing contracts and important business letters in Latin. There were of course business letters in Italian, Dutch, French, and English, but Latin letters were always considered better and often thought to be legally more binding.

Erasmus was very concerned about the proper pronunciation of Latin. Since Latin was supposed to be the medium of polite exchange, he wanted it to be understandable, so that those who had learned Latin in Italy and those who had learned Latin in Scotland would actually be able to communicate. Instead, what usually happened was that they could not understand each other at all. There is a famous exchange from the 18th century demonstrating the long-term persistence of the very problem Erasmus was trying to prevent: Voltaire went to England and met the great Samuel Johnson. Each spoke Latin to the other, since neither wished to attempt the other's language — and neither could understand what the other was saying. The pronunciations of the English public schoolboy and the French student of the Jesuits were so radically different that there was no communication whatever.

Erasmus tried to determine what the classical pronunciation of Latin had actually been, and he did a fairly good job of it. He and his friends who worked in various printing shops were able to compare texts from different periods — Greek texts rendering Latin words in the Greek alphabet, which had clearly been pronounced very differently at the time of that rendering than they were pronounced later — as well as Latin translations of Greek terms. He tried to establish exactly what the classical pronunciations of Greek and Latin had been. And if it was classical, it was correct, and so everybody ought to pronounce Latin in the classical fashion — which is very much the effort of faculties of classics in American, Scottish, German, and European universities today. Unfortunately, Erasmus' major work toward this goal of classical perfection came to little practical conclusion, because in the century after Erasmus, the vernacular tongues sprang up to become the normal media of communication in West European society.

So Erasmus was certainly an enthusiastic lover of the classical legacy — but not of every object that classical literature contained, not everything it presented: not the immoralities, not the confusions of priorities, not the love of too good a life. What he disliked was what led to an uncritical exhuming of pagan values and priorities. And he felt this very strongly in the sermons he heard in Rome in the year 1509 — sermons preached during the Christmas season, not in honor of Christ, not by the Pope who traditionally was supposed to deliver quite a series of sermons at that particular point, but in praise of the absent Pope Julius II, who was out conquering parts of the old papal state which had been alienated by the wicked Cesare Borgia and reintegrating them. Julius II was praised by the humanist preachers Erasmus heard and compared, in elegant Latin, to such models as Julius Caesar, Alexander the Great, Epaminondas of Thebes, and other great pagan shedders of blood.

Erasmus was also disturbed by all the closet pagans he knew all too well — people who had, because of their love for classical literature and classical culture, essentially thrown off Christianity. They could not afford to do that publicly, but in their private lives and private conversations, they made clear a very broad range of skeptical thoughts and beliefs.

Pope Julius II: Enthusiasm for a Good Cause Gone Wrong

The enthusiasm of Pope Julius for the liberty of the Church was, again, another example of what enthusiasm could do to a good man and a good cause. Julius was greatly concerned by the fact that in every part of Western Europe, the local church was slipping more and more under the control of kings — or, in the case of Italy, of republican governments. Where perhaps the medieval church had gone too far in asserting its independence of secular authority, creating a kind of theocracy which has its precedents in the Hebrew Scriptures but is certainly not part of the legacy of the Gospel — Thomas Aquinas had defended papal theocracy, but he was very hard put to find any scriptural text with which to back up that fundamentally more Aristotelian than Hebrew doctrine — now this had all vanished. The church had lost much of its credibility. In Germany, local princes wanted to gain even more control over the church than they already had. The Holy Roman Emperor fought with them to maintain the degree of control he had over appointments and church properties. Very shortly in England, King Henry VIII would break with Rome in order to achieve complete control over the economic life and the personnel of the church, and had already given signs as early as 1513 that he was tending in that direction. In France, the church had come completely under the domination of the state,

and Julius's successor would sign a peace treaty with the French king subjecting the French church absolutely to royal control.

All of these movements were in the making — not finally consummated until after the vigorous reign of Julius II, who was as staunch a diplomat as he was a warrior. But Julius was determined to try to stop them. Why? Because he had a vivid sense of the Church as the legacy of Christ to the poor, to the widows, to the orphans — people about whom the kings of the world cared not a whit, except in occasional pious statements accompanied by a little bit of alms. And what Julius was trying to do, as a first step in restoring to the Western Church its autonomy and its primacy, its control of the fortunes of the poor, was first of all to recuperate the papal state.

What happened, of course, was the tragedy of going overboard. His enthusiasm for that end allowed him to indulge another enthusiasm: enthusiasm for artillery. It was said that the sound he loved most in the world was not Gregorian chant, not the recitation of the Gospel, nor the secular singing of lyric poets or the romantic themes of drama — it was the sound of cannon fire. He loved to go out and watch the papal cannon fire away, and simply not think about the bodies of Christian men who were dismembered by the cannonballs when they landed.

The thing that most upset Erasmus, I think even more than the sermons he heard in praise of Julius' martial presence rather than his role as Vicar of Christ, was a sight he had witnessed before he went to Rome in 1509. He was working in Venice with the great printing press of Aldus Manutius when he went down to the city of Bologna, which had long been part of the papal state. It had been detached from the papal state by Cesare Borgia, the natural son of the wicked and corrupt Pope Alexander VI, and made part of Borgia family territory. The Bolognese then rebelled and established their own independent government under a condottiere rather than a

republican regime — not a very impressive kind of government, and this is what Pope Julius conquered.

Erasmus saw Julius riding into Bologna in a great triumphal procession — a triumphal procession in which he was dressed magnificently, not as the Vicar of the poor man of Galilee, but as the world's greatest secular prince, in the finest silks, brocades, and cloth of gold that the Renaissance could provide, wearing on his head, as a sign of his office, a mitre studded with pearls and embroidered with gold thread. And Erasmus wrote that he asked himself, watching the sight: is this man the Vicar of Jesus Christ, or of Julius Caesar? And since Julius had kept his own given name, Giulio, when he ascended the papal throne, Erasmus felt that at last, finally, and alas, he knew the answer.

Legacy

Erasmus died a dozen years after he had parted ways with the enthusiastic reformer Luther. He died in 1536, the year the young John Calvin published his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* — perhaps the classic statement of Protestant Christianity, at least of that variety which has the doctrine of predestination as its cornerstone. Not a book Erasmus would have liked. Erasmus was not unhappy to die, having outlived the humane Renaissance whose most optimistic phase he had embodied with such sober brilliance.

Erasmus' legacy lived on, reaching a second peak in the ecumenical movement of 20th-century Christianity. What most Christians of the Catholic tradition — which had earlier seen Erasmus as subversive — and of the mainline Protestant churches — whose predecessors had earlier seen Erasmus as evasive, as he argued with Luther about grace, predestination, and the role of free will in human salvation — now see in Erasmus is a great prophet, a great forerunner of the way

Christianity ought to be: the kind of Christian humanist, not secular humanist, that Christianity seeks to produce, or should seek to produce, in the realm of culture which it can influence.

But before the ecumenical movement of the present century, Erasmus' legacy had inspired the most tolerant wings of Western Europe's established national churches. For example, the extraordinary religious tolerance of the established Calvinist church of the Netherlands — Erasmus' own homeland — is a striking case. Though Erasmus never returned to his homeland after an early point in his life, he was very proud of the Dutch for their industry and understanding. Although the Church of the Netherlands was a Calvinist church, the leaders of that church were very aware that, once they had won independence from fanatically Catholic Spain in the late 16th century, they had within their territory a large and very Dutch Catholic minority to rule — and to rule justly and humanely. They also had to deal with the tendency of Calvinist churches to split apart over fine points of doctrine with the same kind of enthusiastic zeal that had characterized the divisions among Dominicans, Franciscans, conceptualists, realists, and nominalists in medieval Catholicism. And so this church, from the early 17th century onward, became extremely tolerant of private Catholicism and invited Jewish communities from all over the world to come to Amsterdam and make it the center of free Jewish self-expression — which it did indeed become.

Polish Catholicism, too, was extraordinarily tolerant, until it was overwhelmed by Cossack attacks from within and conquest from without by Russian, Prussian, and Austrian rulers. And certainly in England, Erasmus' legacy inspired the low church and high church latitudinarianism of 18th and 19th century Anglicanism.

In a more secular vein, one could say that Erasmus' condemnation of enthusiasm — even in what might seem at first a good and idealistic

cause — helped inspire Edmund Burke's stirring defense of tradition in his writings on the French Revolution. And even in a curious kind of turnabout that Erasmus might have accepted, it inspired Burke's defense of what he called prejudice — not what we call prejudice, but what a learned man might recognize as the accumulated wisdom of tradition: the very kind of inheritance that Erasmus had spent his life trying to understand, refine, and pass on.

Lecture 29: Galileo and the New Astronomy

Professor Alan Kors

Introduction: Astronomy and the Scholastic World View

This lecture will concern Galileo and the new astronomy. Astronomy held a favored place in the thought of the Aristotelian scholastics who dominated the European universities at the dawn of the 17th century.

The scholastics divided the world between that above the moon — the celestial heavens, close to God, where things were perfect and unchanging — and the sublunar world, the world below the moon, where nothing was constant, where the elements were all mixed, where things changed, composed, decomposed, and recomposed. The astronomy that the scholastics had inherited from the ancients, and that fit this model wonderfully, was the astronomy of the ancient Greek philosopher Ptolemy, which seemed wonderfully consistent with their philosophical and theological system. Ptolemaic astronomy held that the Earth was at the center of the universe. The moon, the planets, the sun, and an orb of fixed stars revolved around the Earth in perfect, unchanging, circular motion.

What made the Earth's position dramatic at the center of the universe was not that this was a privileged place, but that it was the farthest remove from God. And the goal of life — which astronomy reinforced — was to move from the corrupt, changing world below the moon to the eternal, unchanging heavens close to God.

The Neo-Pythagorean Challenge

Among the intellectual movements that arose in early modern Europe — above all in the 15th, 16th, and 17th centuries — to challenge the dominant Aristotelian scholasticism was what we term Neo-Pythagorean thought: a revival of the thought of the ancient Greek mathematician and mystic Pythagoras.

Where the Aristotelians and Scholastics viewed the universe in terms of its perfections and its purposes — that is, qualitatively — the Neo-Pythagoreans viewed the universe quantitatively, in terms of mathematics and geometry. The worldview of Aristotelian Scholasticism expressed the conception that all things had a particular essence that made each thing uniquely what it was, and that this essence had to do with perfections, things shared with God and with the higher qualities. All things moved with a purpose that reflected that essence. Base things such as earth and flesh fell toward the center of the earth. Nobler things such as fire — which could purge material things, which could purge flesh — rose toward the heavens. Everything moved to express its qualities and its purposes.

For the Neo-Pythagoreans, the divine mind — God — expressed itself in terms of the order, the harmonies, the ratios, the mathematics of the creation. Reality emanated from the mind of the divinity itself, and it was numerical and geometrical. The Pythagoreans had worshipped the sun. The Neo-Pythagoreans saw the sun — bright, luminous, perfectly circular — as an emblem of the divinity itself.

Johannes Kepler

One of the most remarkable thinkers in the history of European thought, and a figure foundational to the emergence of early modern science, was Johannes Kepler — who was as much an

astrologer as an astronomer, who was a numbers mystic, and who was always looking for the quantitative rather than the qualitative expression of the divine mind in reality. He reveals to us the fusion, at the birth of early modern astronomy and physics, of Neo-Pythagorean numerical mysticism on the one hand and a natural philosophy that would demonstrate the extraordinary fruitfulness of a quantitative science to the West on the other.

Kepler inherited the work of the 16th-century Polish astronomer Copernicus, whose attempts to reform the calendar had led him to devise a system — one that was suppressed and offered to the world simply as a model by which one could perform calculations, not as a true picture of reality, though Copernicus himself believed that it was a true picture of reality — a universe in which the sun, not the Earth, was at the center. Kepler was profoundly drawn to Copernicus' unproven heliocentric hypothesis. Heliocentric: the Sun at the center of the universe.

Kepler believed that with the sun at the rightful center of the universe, the quantitative and geometrical harmonies and ratios of God's creation would be disclosed to the human mind. Inheriting the data of the Danish astronomer Tycho Brahe — more accurate than any astronomical observations previously made — and convinced that Copernicus was correct, that the luminous, circular sun was at the center of the system, Kepler went through an ordeal of mathematical hard labor, working only with algebra and geometry, since analytic geometry was still in its infancy and the calculus had not yet been devised. After years and years of calculations, often spending more than a year on the orbit of any given planet, Kepler arrived at his first two laws of planetary motion.

The first held that the planets, including the Earth, described elliptical, not circular, orbits around the Sun. The second proclaimed

that the line joining a planet to the Sun — the radial vector — swept out equal areas in equal times.

Kepler now had his sun at the center of the system with ratios and harmonies consistent with his Neo-Pythagorean commitments, and he had made sense of the data of Tycho Brahe. But Kepler loathed what he saw as the imperfect ellipses — the loss of the perfect circles in the heavenly spheres. He wrote to a friend that these were, and I translate very politely, "a cart full of dung." And thus, for ten more years of excruciating mathematical labor, Kepler engaged in a computational struggle to find God's harmony in this universe of ellipses. Some extraordinary order alone could justify the ellipses in God's universe.

And in 1619, he found it in his third law of planetary motion: that the square of the period of the revolution of a planet is proportional to the cube of its average distance from the Sun. For Kepler, it now all was worthwhile. The beauty, the glory of the divine mind was now evident in the creation. Introducing his third law of planetary motion in his great work on the *Harmony of the World*, Kepler expressed himself not in terms that we are accustomed to think of in the modern age as scientific, but as follows. He wrote:

I let myself go in divine rage. I have stolen the golden vessels of the Egyptians to make a proper home for my God. If you are angry with me, I shall bear it. It does not matter if my book finds its reader in a hundred years or in a thousand years — has not God himself awaited 6,000 years for a human mind to gaze upon his work with understanding?

Galileo: Method and the Quantitative Universe

One of Kepler's first ardent readers was the great Italian mathematician Galileo — Kepler's admirer, friend, and fellow

astronomer. But Galileo could not accept Kepler's laws. They seemed too speculative to him. Galileo had the mathematics inherited from the Neo-Pythagoreans, but he did not have their mysticism. The appeal of Kepler's system was not, in Galileo's view, that it could be demonstrated, but only that it added, if true, a certain order to the creation — and we did not yet know whether those laws were true.

Galileo, however, profoundly shared Kepler's sense that nature was to be understood quantitatively and not in terms of perfections or purposes. Galileo's method was that we could not learn from the inherited books of human beings, but must learn from God's actual creation. And that meant that natural philosophy — what we today would term science — began with induction from observation. One looked at the particulars of nature, one observed them, and one induced from those particulars general principles about the operations and nature of the world. Then the human mind had to engage in the difficult task of deducing a precise hypothesis from those principles. And since nature, not the books of man, was to be our judge, one devised an experiment that would let nature decide whether one's hypothesis were correct — arriving at one's conclusions in natural philosophy by means of a compelling demonstration which, for Galileo, meant demonstration on the basis of observation and mathematics.

Galileo perfected — to such an extent that one should say he invented — the telescope, which allowed the human eye to observe the heavens with degrees of magnification undreamed of by prior observers. And the power of observation linked to mathematical proof took categorical precedence for Galileo over any presumptive authority of tradition.

For example, in the scholastic system, the moon was perfectly smooth. But from observation, and from seeing shadows in the craters, Galileo could infer from the data of nature that there were

mountains and valleys on the moon. The sun must be perfectly circular — but sunspots and solar flares Galileo projected onto paper, and then using triangulation and geometry showed that, knowing two sides and two angles of a triangle, one compellingly knew the angle of the third part — and that this demonstration overcame any sense that theories which had stood the test of time must be accepted as correct.

Primary and Secondary Qualities

Galileo's most revolutionary assault upon Aristotelian scholasticism was not his Copernican astronomy, though that is what would ultimately get him into such great difficulty. Rather, it was his view of reality itself — above all, his rejection of qualitative perfections in favor of quantity in the universe, and his distinction between what he termed the primary and secondary qualities of the things of the world.

Secondary qualities — in which category he placed almost all of the Aristotelian qualities — were not real properties of the objects described, but depended upon human perception of them. Such things as sweetness or bitterness, which the scholastics placed as qualities residing in the object itself, in the thing we observed and experienced, were for Galileo the result of the effect of an object upon the human senses. Sweetness, color — almost all of what we thought of as the qualities that things possessed in the world did not reside in the entity, but were a result of human experience and the human senses interacting with the real qualities of what was out there.

What, then, were those real qualities — the primary qualities — that truly existed apart from perception, that existed where there was no mind, no human senses to observe them? For Galileo, these qualities

of the objects themselves, these primary realities of God's natural creation, were all quantitative. They were dimension, shape, mass — the measurable. What the scholastics called perfections and imperfections in things were for Galileo human projections upon a natural world that was simply quantity: mass in motion, a world to be understood in terms of mathematical law.

Empirical observation, mathematical ordering, and mathematical testing led us to understand the laws of motion. And that is what physics, dynamics, and mechanics were — not an account of perfections or purposes, but the laws of matter in motion. Motion described the relationship of bodies to time and to distance. It did not express the perfections or the purposes of things.

Galileo Against Authority

All of these views led Galileo into the most intense struggles with the Aristotelians who dominated both the hierarchy of the church and the universities of Europe. Galileo argued explicitly against Aristotle and against the principle of intellectual authority that held that which has stood the test of time to be true, and that humility consisted in accepting what the ancients had believed. For Galileo, humility was accepting what God had actually written in the book of nature — the book open to our gaze. Facts, Galileo argued, are determined by nature, not by men, not by books. Not even the Pope, he wrote, could make something that God had made a fact into a non-fact, or something that God had not made a fact into one.

Indeed, he reminded the scholastics that Aristotle himself, in his theory of knowledge, had called upon human beings to begin with observation of the world and with induction — with inference from observation of the world. And he always would say to his opponents: "If Aristotle were here today, he would agree with me." His

opponents refused to look through his telescope, saying it was flawed and obviously created optical illusions — because we had always known what was there. Galileo said Aristotle would look. He wrote to Kepler: I don't know whether one should laugh or whether one should cry.

With critics of the new astronomy insisting that the Copernican hypotheses — which Galileo accepted — were contradicted by Scripture, Galileo distinguished between what he termed the two revelations from God. His book of nature was our source of knowledge about the creation; his book of Scripture was our source of knowledge about salvation and things beyond nature. Quoting an ancient Father of the Church, Galileo wrote: "Scripture does not teach us how the heavens go; it teaches us how to go to heaven."

If God had intended to write a text of physics, he could have done so in an infinitely superior way to what Scripture had to say about the things of science. But God had done it in an infinitely superior way — he had given us the creation, nature, and that was where one looked. Our senses, our intellect, our reason, our ability to engage in mathematical proofs — these were gifts from God. Experience and mathematical logic were irrefutable, because God's creation itself was the ultimate test of reality and human knowledge.

Debating with an Aristotelian scholastic opponent, Galileo wrote that the scholastics did not know how to study what God had created in nature. "First," he said, "you must know where to look — and we look not in the books in our libraries, handed down generation to generation. We look in the book of the creation, the book of nature itself." And secondly, Galileo observed — and here the legacy of Neo-Pythagoreanism is so strong in him — to read that book of nature, one must know its language. And its language, he wrote, is the language of line and geometry and number, without which the book of nature is indecipherable.

The Condemnation of Galileo

Galileo's dogged defense of the Copernican hypothesis led him ultimately into his final difficulty with the Aristotelian scholastics who dominated the office of the Inquisition in Italy and the Church and the universities in general. He had been asked to write a comparison of the Ptolemaic and Copernican world systems and to conclude that the issues were so thorny and difficult that the human mind could only rely upon the authority of the Church. He wrote such a book and he offered such a conclusion, but the problem was that in the hundreds of pages leading up to that conclusion, he offered demonstration after demonstration in support of the Copernican hypothesis and refutation after refutation of the Ptolemaic system.

This led to his being summoned before the Inquisition, shown the instruments of torture, recanting his commitment to the Copernican system, and suffering a house arrest that lasted until his death — during which time, in violation of the orders placed upon him, he wrote a textbook that became the foundation of modern physics.

Consequences and Legacy

The prosecution of Galileo by the Church — which was above all, within Catholicism, the persecution of the anti-Aristotelians by the Aristotelian scholastics who dominated the institutions of the Church — affected both the substance and the symbolism of the new science. For example, René Descartes in Paris had just completed a manuscript called *The World*, whose astronomy was based upon the Copernican hypothesis. Hearing of the condemnation of Galileo, he put it in the drawer of a desk, and it was not published until after his death.

The persecution also created of Galileo a powerful symbol — a martyr to the freedom to philosophize and to speculate, a martyr of the new philosophy and the new science. The persecution intimidated many, but what it could not end was the extraordinary excitement of the 17th-century mind: authors rejecting authority, believing that for the first time — as Kepler had believed — with proper method, the human mind was looking upon God's work with comprehension.

Lecture 30: Bacon's *New Organon* and the New Science

Professor Alan Kors

Introduction: Bacon's Dissatisfactions

We shall lecture in this particular moment on Francis Bacon's *New Organon*, one of the most dramatic works in the history of Western philosophy and one of the most influential. To understand Francis Bacon's contribution to Western thought, one must begin with his dissatisfactions.

Francis Bacon was one of many in his generation who entered a university system that had been essentially unchanged for hundreds of years. The universities of Western Europe had existed above all else to train clergy, and they led students through courses in Aristotelian philosophy and a grounding in that language of natural philosophy which the Church and the doctors of the Church believed best allowed one to express in natural terms the truth of the Christian revelation — and which passed on the intellectual inheritance of the West that had stood the test of time.

But in the course of the 16th century, there is a dramatic revolution in education in the West: an exponential increase in the founding of colleges and universities, an increase in secondary and higher education, where the children of aristocrats, wealthy merchants, royal ministers, and people ambitious for careers with the new, larger states of Europe all sought learning — but were submitted to the same education that had been designed for the training of the clergy of Europe for centuries.

Francis Bacon's life reflected the changes occurring in the audience of higher education. His grandfather had been a clerk to a

monastery, keeping its books and accounts. His father, loyal to the king, had been given those very lands during the Protestant Reformation in England, when the lands of the Church were seized, and had risen to very high political position in England. And his son, Francis Bacon, entered Cambridge University at the end of the 16th century brimming with worldly ambitions and concerns, but encountering the traditional Aristotelian scholastic education.

A contemporary and friend of Bacon wrote that it was at Cambridge that Francis Bacon "first fell into the dislike of the philosophy of Aristotle, finding it a philosophy only strong for disputations and contentions, but barren of the production of works for the benefit of mankind." And it is that contrast — between Bacon's vision of the possibility of works for the benefit of mankind on the one hand, and on the other his sense of the whole inherited scholastic and educational system and texts of the West as barren of those works, as producing only disputation, debate, and contention — that one must keep in mind to understand the intellectual career and itinerary of Francis Bacon.

Bacon's Assault on the Philosophical Tradition

In the early 17th century, even as he begins a political ascent that will lead him to the position of Lord Chancellor of England, Bacon the philosopher begins his momentous assault upon the traditional philosophies. He argued, in a dramatic series of works, that the European philosophical tradition was to be condemned on several grounds, but upon two in particular.

First, it had mixed religion and natural philosophy — what we today would term science — to the confusion of both. There was a Christian revelation that had to do with piety, with salvation, with our duty toward God, with revealed mysteries beyond natural

knowledge; and then there was natural philosophy, which concerned learning what God actually had wrought in this world. The traditional European universities, for Bacon, building upon the ancient traditions of the West, had confused these two — allowing religion to be a source of alleged knowledge of the natural creation, and using natural philosophy to discuss things that were in fact beyond its powers and beyond its ken.

The second great fault of the inherited European philosophical tradition, for Bacon, was that it had substituted a concern for words in place of a concern for things. The admired masters of European philosophy were not admired because of their mastery of things, but for their manipulation of words — their ability to debate, their ability to persuade by rhetoric, to construct abstract and deep-sounding systems independent of the question of whether those systems had in any way captured the reality of the things of this world.

For Bacon, European thought had become enslaved to the systems of five or six Greeks — systems which had infected Europe's relationship with nature. Take almost any contemporary debate, or look at the history of philosophy and philosophical debate, and it was not a history of the human mind debating what we actually knew or did not know about the world before us. It was the pitting of this Greek system of thought against that Greek system of thought. And who were those Greeks? Were they thinkers who had gone out open-mindedly to investigate, hoping they might be proved wrong in order to advance human knowledge? No — they were people who sat in rooms and wrote words on paper and earned their reputation by words or by the history of their arguments.

Redefining Knowledge and Its Goals

Bacon wanted to convince his audience — that is, educated Christian Europe — to redefine the meaning and the goals of human knowledge. And he believed that he could win first the interest and sympathy, and then the convictions, of that civilization in two fundamental ways.

First, by convincing them that new kinds of knowledge and new methods of knowledge would make possible an expansion of human empire over the phenomena upon which our suffering or well-being depended in this world. We needed a knowledge that could change the human relationship to nature, to well-being, and to suffering. Second, and deeply related to this, he believed that he could convince his audience that the Christian ethic demanded knowledge in the service of charity — which meant that the fruits of knowledge were not to be fame, reputation, or eloquence. The fruits of knowledge would be the power to enhance the condition of one's fellow creatures, to reduce their suffering, to add to their well-being. He wrote that God himself, in the New Testament, had instructed us to judge things by their fruits, and that this was true of all human endeavors, including the pursuit and use of knowledge.

If those fruits, he wrote, were the thorns and thistles of contention and barren, sterile debate, rather than a charity that could alter the human relationship to nature and hence to suffering or well-being, then let that knowledge — which produces merely thistles and thorns as its fruits — be, in his phrase, "set at naught."

What could be more dramatic? Let all received knowledge be set at naught. Let us begin again. And he undertook his major life's work: the *Great Instauration* — the new beginning, a new search for, acquisition of, and definition of what human knowledge was and could be.

The Novum Organum

At the heart of that enterprise lay a work with the most audacious imaginable title for the 17th century — a work he called in Latin the *Novum Organum*, the New Organon. Every student in Europe moving into higher education passed through the philosophy of Aristotle by way of a set of works collected under the title Aristotle's *Organon*. It was Aristotle's instrument for acquiring knowledge — the *Organon*. It lay at the heart of European education. Bacon's audacious work is the new organon: the new instrument or method for acquiring useful knowledge.

It is important to understand the audacity of that gesture for the 17th-century mind, which was typical of a traditionalist society. Change was always dangerous. If you change the way you grow crops, we could all starve — there could be no harvests — because we had learned things that had stood the test of time. That is why there was a presumptive authority of the past: something about the past had gotten us to here, to the present. And we held to those things that stood the test of time. If there had been errors in the old astronomy, the old physics, the old philosophies, over the course of two millennia people would have found those errors — just as they would have found them in agriculture, just as they would have found them in any field of endeavor from child-rearing to mathematics. We were recipients of what had stood that test.

Bacon reverses that entire model. The ancients were the children — the childhood, the youth of mankind. We have lived longer. We acquire new experience. We learn; we build upon and alter what they have done. And now we know the sterility of the system that we have inherited. Philosophers have been arguing the same questions — with nothing but reputation and temporary fame at stake — for

hundreds, for thousands of years, and what has it done for human life?

Compare, Bacon urged his readers, compare what happens where, without great minds and without systematic thought, human beings continually improve upon knowledge. Look at navigation. None of our great minds are engaged in navigation, but look at the cumulative progress — look at what we have mastered, look at how we accomplished what the ancients never could accomplish in charting our courses and crossing the seas. They were the youth of mankind. We are added experience, and with a new organon, with a new instrument of knowledge, we may alter our relationship to the world.

The Four Great Themes of the *New Organon*

The *New Organon* has four essential and profoundly influential themes.

The first is that knowledge is human power. Knowledge of rivers or crops is not a speculative, contemplative knowledge of God's purposes, nor a speculative, contemplative knowledge of philosophical categorization. It is the ability to harness power — to predict and prevent floods, to navigate correctly, to grow crops successfully, to improve crops and breeds, to avoid human starvation. Knowledge of something is a human power that enhances the human place in the world and that can be used for human charity.

The second great theme of the *New Organon* is that there must be a separation of natural philosophy — science — from theology. Just as it is not the place of natural philosophers to go beyond the data of the world and talk about mysteries of salvation and the nature of God, so it is not the place of theologians to restrict or influence, by

their coercive authority, the free human study of the world in which we find ourselves. Humility, for Francis Bacon, is not submitting to human theological or ecclesiastical authority. It is not submitting to this or that human author. It is submitting one's mind to what God actually has done in the world in which we find ourselves. And so he wrote: let us give to natural philosophy that which is hers, and to theology that which is hers, and not confuse the two.

The third great theme of Bacon's *New Organon* is that the method for the acquisition of knowledge is induction — proceeding logically from the particulars of experience to generalizations about experience that are then tested by experiment. In the system of received authority, we know what is true about the world, and we need deductive logic — as in geometry — to proceed from what we know axiomatically to what follows from what we already know, to what is contained within it. For Bacon, that assumption of authority is precisely what he is challenging. The question is not what follows from this or that philosophy taken axiomatically, but what follows from observing the particulars of the world. And when we observe the particulars of the world, we draw from them a generalization about oats, then about grains, then about agriculture. And because our minds are so prone to error, we must test those generalizations — asking: if I am right about this generalization, what would follow experimentally in this or that situation? One seeks to prove oneself wrong. Only when one has firm generalizations tested by experience does one then induce — infer from them — new, higher generalizations. And when those are tested, yet higher generalizations, as one moves toward an attempt to understand the laws of nature. No one mind can do this. The thought that a philosopher gives us a system of the world is absurd for Bacon.

And so his fourth great theme is that science is a dynamic, cooperative, and cumulative enterprise. Science is dynamic in that it

is always correcting itself — it never takes anything as static and final. It must be cooperative: people must share their data and their experiments, and let other people attempt the same tests, for one mind is so prone to error that we want the cooperation of minds inquiring into nature. And hence it is always cumulative: we are always adding to human knowledge.

Method is absolutely crucial in the *New Organon*. Without the method of induction and a dynamic, cooperative, cumulative science, genius doesn't matter. In one of his most famous metaphors, Bacon describes method as a path. The right method is a path toward where you want to go. Genius is fleetness of foot. On the wrong path, a genius just gets further and further from the truth more quickly. But even a plodder, with the right method on the right path, moves us ever closer toward truth about God's world.

The Idols of the Mind

Why are we so hesitant to learn patiently from nature through observation, induction, and experiment? It is because — and this theme is wholly consistent with Bacon's Christian and Protestant philosophy — we are creatures of such pride and arrogance that, instead of weighting our minds down to the world by observation and experiment, we want to fly toward generalizations and systems of the world on the basis of one or two observations. And when we do that, we end up worshipping not God's actual creation. We worship what Bacon calls the idols of the mind. Idolatry is a great sin in Christian theology. We worship the idols of the mind — what we have created in our own minds as images of nature — not what God has created and we patiently have studied and learned.

There are four sets of idols for Francis Bacon. He calls the first the idols of the tribe — the human tribe. These are the idols inherent in

human nature itself: our impatience, our desire to fly toward final knowledge rather than to be cautious, prudent, careful, and suspicious of our own error. We are struck not by the systematically observed, but by something startling, something sudden, or something unusual — and we build our theories from those.

There are the idols of the cave: the particular biases of the individual human being resulting from that person's education, that person's psychology, that person's needs. The idols of the tribe and the cave acting together mean that once someone has articulated a theory of nature, or of some part of nature, as his own, he will seek not to see if it is true, but always to advance it because it is his.

The third set of idols are the idols of the marketplace — the currency in which knowledge is traded: words. We have inherited words that are so ambiguous in their meaning. We have names of things that we do not know exist. We have words that can mean four different things to four different minds. And those words take the place of our knowledge of things.

And there is what he terms the idols of the theater: those whom we see on stage, declaiming to us our received philosophical tradition — the so-called great philosophers worshipped under the notion of authority, as if it were Aristotle, or Pliny, or Ptolemy, or Galen, whom one should adore rather than the author of nature known through the careful study of his works. And above all the idols of the theater, there is the authority of Aristotle, from which the West must break free if it is to pursue knowledge toward the end of charity, toward understanding of the world in which we find ourselves.

The New Atlantis

Bacon writes a work that is his utopian vision of the world, a work called *The New Atlantis*, which deals dramatically with the place of

natural knowledge in society. In *The New Atlantis*, human beings govern their relationship to nature and society by the use of knowledge, and they do this on behalf of their own interest in human well-being and in the improvement of the human condition. The instrument of that human betterment was knowledge methodically drawn from patient observation and experiment.

At the center of *The New Atlantis* is the House of Solomon, where the philosophers work with the new method. And over the edifice is inscribed the statement of the end toward which they are working, which is: "the effecting of all things possible."

Lecture 31: Descartes — The Method of Modern Philosophy

Professor Alan Kors

Introduction: Descartes' Dream

We lecture now on René Descartes and his system of philosophical dualism. René Descartes sought nothing less than to reconstruct all of human knowledge. His work, called Cartesian Philosophy — from his name in Latin, *Cartesius* — became the great challenge to Aristotelian scholasticism in the 17th century, above all on the European continent.

René Descartes spoke to the ultimate dream of Western philosophy that had been articulated by Plato in his Allegory of the Cave in the *Republic*, where human beings were portrayed as sitting in a cave, seeing merely the reflections on the wall of that cave as objects pass by on the exterior. We were creatures of the cave of human experience. All things were known to us only in that experience — we saw only the shadows of things on the walls of the cave of our experience. In Plato's allegory, the ideal philosopher is the being who steps out of that cave and sees and knows directly things in themselves, things as they really are. Would such a philosopher be treated as a madman, describing those things to the occupants of the cave? Would such a philosopher be blinded by the light outside of that cave?

Descartes' own dream for himself and his philosophy was nothing less than perfect knowledge of being — knowing things in themselves, what they truly were, not how they appeared in our experience — and perfect knowledge of causes: why and how things happened in this world in which we found ourselves. The appeal of

the system that arose from Descartes' dream of perfect knowledge extended both to rationalist and mystical theologians and to mechanistic science and students of physics and physiology. The appeal of his system went across the entire spectrum of European interests, thoughts, and commitments.

The Five Convergences

We face, among other things, the dilemma of the Cartesian drama: why does a thinker come to define so many of the options of an intellectual age? First, there must be many things that are vital or troubling to a given period that converge in that thinker's work. And that is very much the case with Descartes, who seemed to resolve for so many of his contemporaries the central intellectual dilemmas of their time. There are five primary convergences in particular to which the Cartesian response arouses very great enthusiasm.

The first is the epistemological crisis of the Reformation. Epistemology, as you know, is the theory of knowledge. The crisis in the theory of knowledge produced by the Reformation arose because there had always been, ultimately, in European thought, a final supreme court in intellectual debate — a final location of authority: the authority of the Church. The Pope in council had always been a final court of appeal. But now the debate was precisely over that claim to the location of authority. It would obviously beg the question — the issue of the ultimate location of authority splitting Protestants and Catholics — to appeal either to the authority of the Church or to the authority of Scripture as understood by Protestants independent of the authority of the Church. That dilemma — what do you do when there are two competing claims of absolute, final intellectual authority — made the

question of where one locates intellectual authority central to European minds.

Very much related to this, the second convergence: the 16th and early 17th centuries saw the revival and growing appeal of classical Greek skepticism, whose works were now among the bestsellers of the period. Skepticism as a philosophy argues that it is impossible for a human mind to know with certainty — that in logic there is always a question that is begged, and that in matters of experience there always is the problem of the absence of logical necessity. Many theologians arguing on behalf of either the necessity of the authority of Scripture or the necessity of the authority of the Catholic Church and apostolic succession used philosophical skepticism to show the necessity of a location of ultimate intellectual authority beyond the practices of the human mind — and theologians themselves fed much of the growing erudite, scholarly, or simply curious appeal of ancient Greek skepticism.

The third convergence — and the greatest specter of that skepticism — was what was called the new Pyrrhonism, after the compiler of ancient Greek skepticism at the end of the classical age, Pyrrho, who had argued not only that nothing was known with certainty, but that the proposition "nothing could be known with certainty" could not itself be known with certainty. Pyrrho applied skeptical criteria to skepticism itself. In the revival of Pyrrho's skepticism in the 16th and 17th centuries — particularly in the *Outlines* of Sextus Empiricus, the work in which he translates, advances, and explains the traditions of classical Greek skepticism — Pyrrhonism came to represent the ultimate abyss into which the human mind might fall.

Pyrrho made central to that exposition the problem of a criterion of truth. You ask, in philosophy or in any subject matter, what makes something true or false, and you make that decision on the basis of a criterion of truth: if something meets this criterion, it is true. But now

we ask: what makes your criterion of truth true? You must have a criterion for criteria of truth. But then I ask — and you see the difficulty we are going to arrive at — what makes your criterion for criteria of truth true? Or your criterion for criteria of criteria of truth? And so on, *ad infinitum*. Scholars, philosophers, teachers, and professors of the early 17th century were appalled by the delight that their students seemed to take in pressing these skeptical arguments against all claims of authority. And the professors began to denounce the specter of libertinism — of the young feeling freed from all principles of authority in the wake of the new skepticism.

So there are three epistemological crises: the crisis of authority in the wake of the Reformation, the general appeal of classical skepticism, and the revival of Pyrrhonism with the ultimate problem of a criterion of truth. In addition, Descartes will touch two further primary obsessions of his age, the convergence of all of which accounts so much for his extraordinary popularity. The fourth is the Neo-Pythagorean revival — the great concern for seeing the quantitative nature of things in the universe. And the fifth is the assault upon Aristotle and upon all Aristotelian authority.

The *Meditations*: Hyperbolic Doubt

We may thus read Descartes' great book, his *Meditations on First Philosophy* — a work of such overwhelming influence in the 17th century — as a quest for non-Aristotelian certainty. Descartes begins his work by saying that people who seek to refute skepticism have never made skepticism strong enough. They merely create straw men that they easily knock down, and this leaves us without a successful refutation of skepticism in its strongest form. Descartes seeks to establish what becomes known as hyperbolic doubt: exaggerated

doubt taken to the ultimate possible degree, going beyond even the doubt of the skeptics and their critics.

Not only is there the problem of the criterion of truth; not only is there the problem that our senses present us with such different and contradictory information — a house looks larger than the sun, a twig looks straight in the air but bent in water — but Descartes, strengthening skepticism in order to overcome it, argues that we can't even distinguish between when we think we are dreaming and when we think we are awake. How many times has one in a dream not asked: am I awake or asleep? I'm awake — but there we are, with perceptions of the world and senses of certainty, and we're dreaming, and we have no means of distinguishing between the two.

But his ultimate statement of hyperbolic doubt goes still further. Descartes says: suppose there were an infinitely powerful being who set out to deceive me such that even in adding numbers — between the ninth and the tenth step — he deceives me. An infinitely powerful being who, in a simple, let alone a complex proof, deceives me. If that being exists — and why couldn't such a being exist, he asks at this moment — how could I ever be free of the need to doubt everything? I could doubt whether this room exists. I could doubt whether my hand exists. I could doubt whether 2 plus 2 equals 4. I could doubt any geometrical demonstration. I could think of everything as illusion.

I could doubt my own existence — but wait. I could doubt my own existence, but I cannot, Descartes reasons. That I cannot doubt. For think: if I am wrong, I must exist to be wrong. If I am right, I must exist to be right. If I doubt, I must exist to doubt — just as if I am certain, I must exist to be certain. If I think, I exist. My very posing of the question in thought proves my existence. *Cogito ergo sum*. I think, therefore I am.

From my thinking, from my awareness of myself as a being who thinks — whether or not I have a body, whether or not anything else exists — that much is indubitable. I think, therefore I am. I think, therefore thought exists. That is indubitable. There is a proposition beyond all skepticism that cannot be doubted. And if I discover why it cannot be doubted, I will have a criterion of truth.

Well, why can't I doubt it? First, it is *clear* — meaning, for Descartes, it is self-evident: as soon as the mind sees it, it knows that it must be true and cannot be doubted. Second, it is *distinct* — that is, its truth depends upon no other thing being true, no other thing that might be doubtful being true. It is a clear and distinct idea. So now I know, against the skeptics, that if I build knowledge on a sequence of clear and distinct ideas, I can know truth about the world.

The Proof of Soul and the Proof of God

At this moment in his system, Descartes needs to prove God and the human soul, both to satisfy the demands of Christian philosophy and to fix certainty within his system.

The proof of soul he believes follows immediately from the *cogito ergo sum*. I think, therefore I exist, therefore a thinking being exists. My body might be an illusion, a dream — I might not have a hand, arms, or legs — but there is thought, and that thought exists independent of body, independent of matter, which might be an illusion. Therefore there exists something independent of body, independent of matter: soul, whose essence is thought.

But what about the possibility of this infinitely powerful deceiver that would obstruct all further knowledge of the world beyond what has just been established? And so Descartes seeks clear and distinct proof of the existence of God, offering two proofs.

The first: it is clear and distinct that there cannot be more reality in an effect than in the cause of that effect. I have in my mind the idea of a perfect being. It is there in my mind — the idea of God. I am exploring whether it is true or false, whether such a being exists. But I have the idea of God in my mind as an infinitely perfect being. And I already know that I am not perfect, that my mind can err and can have illusions. Where could the idea of an infinitely perfect being — the object represented to me by my idea of God — come from, except from an infinitely perfect being? The idea could not come from anything finite or imperfect. If I see a painting that represents an object, I know that there must be at least as much reality out there as what is represented by the object. But in this case, the reality represented is infinitely perfect being — it must exist.

The second proof: it is clear and distinct that anything that necessarily belongs to something actually belongs to it, whether or not such an entity is known to exist. For example, a unicorn has one horn — that is what a unicorn is. I do not know if unicorns exist, but a unicorn has one horn; otherwise it would be a self-contradiction, it would not be a unicorn. A triangle has three angles. I do not yet know if a triangle exists — it might not — but a triangle has three angles, whether it exists or not; I would not know what it was if it did exist if I did not already know that. Now I ask about a perfect being: would a perfect being have goodness or evil? It would have goodness — infinite goodness — otherwise it would not be perfect. Would it have wisdom or ignorance? A perfect being must have wisdom, not ignorance. Existence or non-existence? A perfect being must have existence; otherwise it would not be a perfect being.

Therefore, to say that a perfect being necessarily has existence is to say a perfect being necessarily exists — with the same full logical force that a triangle must have three angles and a unicorn must have one horn, yet neither needs to exist. A perfect being, however, must

have existence. In fact, the non-existence of a perfect being would be a logical self-contradiction.

So now I know that there exists a perfect being — infinitely good, infinitely wise, infinitely loving, with necessary existence — and I have eliminated the self-contradiction of the infinitely evil deceiver whom I had first posited as my possible deceiver. That would be a self-contradiction in terms.

Cartesian Physics and the Mind-Body Problem

That is the metaphysical side of Descartes, but there follows from this a distinction between mind and body, and a Cartesian physics that causes at least as much excitement in the 17th century as his metaphysics.

Once I know that God, being perfect, is not a deceiver, I must ask: what if this world were an illusion? I would truly be the victim of the most evil deceiver of all. For if there is anything certain to me, it is that there exists a world apart from my mind. What I need is a clear and distinct idea of it. The essence of soul is thought. Body exists. What must exist for body to exist? What is a clear and distinct idea of it? And for Descartes, the answer is extension in height, width, and breadth. That is body. Extension in three dimensions. And what can be known about extension — about matter, about body? Here Descartes reached essentially the same conclusion reached by Galileo. The physical world is dimension, and occupying space, it is able to move; the mechanisms of matter — matter touching matter and communicating force to matter — account for the physical world.

Indeed, Descartes reasoned metaphysically that given God's existence as a perfect being, his will was fixed. Having set matter into motion, he did so according to fixed mechanical laws of nature. And

Descartes deduced inertia as a physical principle from the fixed will of God: matter at rest remains at rest; matter in motion remains in motion unless acted upon by another force. The task of a new science was to discover the laws and mechanisms and effects of matter — mass, extension, in motion — and how that would account for the physical world that we observed.

The Cartesian legacy here is one of a profound philosophical dualism. God has created two distinct substances: soul, or mind, on the one hand, and body, or matter, on the other. Soul is thought and does not occupy space. Matter occupies space and may be touched.

This leads, in his physics, to a wholly natural mechanism that deals with matter in motion, but it leads also to one profound problem that will haunt Descartes and his followers — and indeed will haunt Western philosophy — and that is the dualism of the mind-body problem. For in human beings, soul, which does not occupy space, and matter, which does, interact. I can be pushed — that is a problem of physics — but I can will myself to raise my arm or to lower my arm: will, soul, affecting body. There is the physiology of fear that Descartes thought we could study: we see the image of a dangerous animal and by reflex we are moved into flight physiologically, but will can decide — stay and protect my child, stay and protect another person, stay and protect my country. How the mind and body interact is the problem.

For Descartes and the Cartesians, however, they do interact — but only in man. And the Cartesians lead the assault upon what they see as the superstition of assigning spiritual causes in nature to material phenomena. This leads them to undertake an assault upon witchcraft belief that will end witchcraft persecutions in the 17th century, even when those persecutions are in fact at their high-water mark. In one generation, the Cartesians will end the educated European belief in witchcraft. Crop failure is a physical problem of plant physiology — it

is not from a spell or from someone's soul. The same is true for disease and the illnesses of cattle.

The Problems Left by Cartesianism

The world seems so clear to the Cartesians, but the problems that they face are many. How do we explain the interaction of spirit and matter in human life? How do we explain the Eucharist — the transformation of the wafer and wine into the body and blood of Christ — if all that exists is matter in motion? What do we do with the concept of miracle if everything that happens physically happens solely by natural cause?

The implications for authority of overcoming Aristotle are extraordinary. Here is a new systematic philosopher overturning the Greeks, who opens up new vistas for the study of metaphysics and the study of a wholly natural physics. But there, gnawing at the center of the system, is the mind-body problem. Descartes' solution — that the soul observes the body at the pineal gland and communicates back and forth — attracts very few. Others say that God causes actions to occur in the body when mental events happen, and in the mind when physical events happen; but this seems to involve God in too much.

And there remain two other options that will haunt Europe. One: that matter doesn't exist — that there are only the objects of mind. And two: materialism — that all mental phenomena are the behavior of body as well. With that, so much of modern philosophy.

Lecture 32: Hobbes, Politics, and the State of Nature

Professor Dennis Dalton

Introduction: Who Was Thomas Hobbes?

This lecture is on Thomas Hobbes, and it will focus on his theory of human nature and the way in which that theory is related to his idea of politics and the state. Who was Thomas Hobbes? He was an English philosopher born in 1588, which means that he was born over 2,000 years after Plato. And yet he, just as Aristotle, had very much Plato in mind when he was writing his political philosophy. He was responding to Plato's rationalism and especially to Plato's utopian — from Hobbes' point of view, unrealistic — thinking in the *Republic*, because Hobbes was, even more than Aristotle, a realist who rejected ideal solutions for politics.

He was the author of the work called the *Leviathan*, which means, in this context, the state. He was born during a period of widespread international warfare, with the so-called wars of religion prevailing and engulfing England, Spain, France, and the Holy Roman Empire. In 1588, the year of Hobbes' birth, the Spanish Armada sailed to invade England. This was the great Armada of Catholicism — it aimed at Protestant England, and if it had succeeded, it is said that we would all be speaking Spanish today. It was the most fearsome and formidable force of naval power that the world had ever seen: 30,000 men, 2,400 pieces of artillery. And Hobbes records that it appeared off the coast of England in April of 1588, just at the time that Hobbes was born.

Born of Fear: The Metaphor of Hobbes' Birth

The metaphor we are using for Hobbes' birth — the way in which this story relates to his entire philosophy — is important. So we want to look at the way in which one of Hobbes' chroniclers, the biographer John Aubrey, describes this critical moment of his birth in *Brief Lives*. Aubrey was a contemporary of Hobbes, and he says: "The day of Hobbes's birth was April the 5th, 1588, on a Friday morning, which that year was also Good Friday. Hobbes's mother fell in labor with him upon the fright of the invasion of the Spaniards."

Hobbes says that this was indeed true — that his mother, pregnant seven months with Hobbes and living on the southern coast of England, saw this force from Spain suddenly loom off the channel and, terrified, gave premature birth to him. Hobbes takes that fact as extremely significant. He says that unbeknownst to his mother, she gave birth at that moment to twins: himself and fear.

It was fear, then, that characterized Hobbes' life. He was a very fearful and timid individual, and yet he builds a philosophy and a political theory that is grounded in this idea of fear, in the way that we shall see. The story of Hobbes' birth serves as a metaphor for his philosophy, with the controlling emotion of his whole system of thought being that of fear — specifically, the fear of violent death, the fear that seemed to await the English had the Spanish Armada succeeded.

It is because, Hobbes says, that we are so driven by fear that we seek security and desperately desire protection. For this protection, we need the state. And the stronger the state, the better it will protect us. The key justification for state power — the source of its final legitimacy — is this: it can protect us, it can give us security. It cannot make us virtuous, as Plato would have it. It cannot even cultivate within us, as Aristotle would have it, an ideal of moderation, of the

mean, and those glorious civic values that Aristotle extols. Rather, the state can do this: it can ensure, insofar as possible, that we are not visited by war — international or civil — that our lives are safe from violence, and that we will be protected, once and for all, from the kind of fear that Hobbes lived through most of his life. For in Hobbes' case, after the international war between England and Spain, there came the fearsome, savage, violent civil war within England itself.

Hobbes as Systematic Philosopher

Hobbes is a systematic philosopher, influenced by geometry, who believed that he had constructed in his masterpiece, the *Leviathan*, a model of logical development and a theory of human nature so tightly systematic that it constitutes a science — a science of politics. He thinks of himself as a physician, as a person who has diagnosed a disease within humankind and specifically within Europe: the disease of violence. The enemy is violence, and he wants to find a remedy for that disease because he believes that all of us fundamentally desire liberation from violence. We want peace. How can we find it?

He argues, first of all, in his theory of human nature — contrary to both Plato and Aristotle — that our behavior is, and can never be, directed by reason. We are creatures of feeling, of emotions, of passions, and our conduct is determined by what Hobbes calls appetites and aversions. He looks at Plato's and Aristotle's theory of happiness and of goodness and asks: what is good or evil? From Hobbes' point of view — very logically, methodically, and realistically — what is good is that which brings us pleasure and a sense of security; what is bad or evil is that which brings us fear and insecurity.

For example, consider the act of viewing a fire. If we are drawn to the fire, it becomes an attraction, an appetite for its warmth, and we see fire in that sense as good. But if the fire threatens to consume us, if it gets out of hand and burns our home down, then it is clearly bad. Goodness and evil are determined entirely on that basis. There is no transcendental justification or identification for good and evil. They are not determined by sin. They have nothing to do with religion. They are not grounded in the metaphysics of Plato or even of Aristotle. They are determined only by the pain-pleasure calculus: good brings us more pleasure and less pain, and evil brings us the opposite.

Power, Fear of Death, and the Desire for Security

The first and greatest appetite we can have, according to Hobbes — the thing that gives us the most pleasure — is the desire for power. And why should this be? Because it is through the desire for power that we can satisfy, and overcome, our greatest fear: the fear of violent death. If we can gain more and more power and develop a greater sense of security, then we can alleviate this terrible fear that we have of death. But the whole reason that we want power is because we need it to combat our greatest aversion, which is the fear of death — the insecurity born of our own mortality, our knowledge that we are always at risk of losing that which is most precious to us, our lives, and that there is violence all around us in a state of war or threat of war. This is what inspires our anxiety.

So as we face this mood of anxiety, our very nature conspires against us, because we are innately driven to threaten, intimidate, or challenge other people as we strive for more and more power. This is not because we are naturally aggressive; it is because we are so filled

with anxiety. We are eternally trying to gain power because we feel that we must have it for our own security.

Hobbes speaks about this in a number of passages, particularly in Chapter 11 of the *Leviathan*, which he calls, deceptively, "Of the Difference of Manners." He begins by saying: "There is, we must realize, no such *finis ultimus*, or utmost aim, no *summum bonum*, greatest good, as is spoken of in the books of the old moral philosophers." That is, there is no eternal state of happiness of the kind that both Plato and Aristotle envisaged. From Plato's point of view, the happy person was the just person, and that was achieved only through the development of a highly educated, sophisticated understanding of the ideal forms. From Aristotle's point of view, happiness was generated through philosophy too — the happiest person was the philosopher, acting according to moderation and serenity in contemplation of the mean. From Hobbes' point of view, that ideal of happiness is too abstract, too unrealistic, too utopian.

What is happiness, then, from Hobbes' point of view? It is "a continual progress of the desire from one object to another, the attaining of one object being still but the way to the next." Happiness is continual satisfaction insofar as we can gain it — more pleasure than pain. It is achieved, if it can be achieved at all, in a state of security. When insecurity, and especially war or civil war, visits us, then we are constantly in a state of dissatisfaction and discontent.

And in one of the more famous passages in the *Leviathan*, Hobbes writes: "I put for a general inclination of all mankind a perpetual and restless desire of power after power, that ceaseth only in death." This is how irrational we are — we strive for more and more power so that we will gain greater pleasure, more happiness, less insecurity. And yet, as we have said, in striving for that power, we threaten and intimidate others, and so we lock ourselves into a vicious cycle.

Because, Hobbes says, the cause of striving for power is not that a man hopes for a more intensive delight than he has already attained, or that he cannot be content with a moderate power, "but because he cannot assure the power and means to live well, which he hath present, without the acquisition of more." What he is saying is that we strive for more and more power not because we are greedy or aggressive, but because we are anxious — always trying to alleviate this terrible, gnawing fear of death and insecurity. It is this fearfulness that is, from Hobbes' point of view, at the bottom of human nature.

And he speaks of it in eloquent terms: man "hath his heart all the day long gnawed on by fear of death or some other calamity, and he has no repose nor pause of his anxiety but in sleep." This perpetual fear is always accompanying mankind. It is an elemental fear, a primitive fear — a fear that we know sometimes when we contemplate our mortality in the middle of the night, wondering when death may come, listening to our hearts.

The Human Predicament

The human predicament is that we are all desperately afraid — afraid of death, afraid of conflict — but that in our quest for security, to escape from fear, we continually act in the most irrational way. Hobbes looked back on Plato and how Plato had insisted that reason can rule the personality, and Hobbes feels that this is completely utopian, that reason can never rule a person's desires. The passions of fear and the desire for power — they determine human nature, not reason. Over and again in the *Leviathan* he says that reason is a force that can calculate appetites against aversions, can estimate the various powers within the personality and how much one vies against another, and as a calculator it can reckon. But reason cannot

do more than that, because reason is no more than a byproduct of the elemental passions within us.

And so, in this terrible predicament, as we strive for more and more security, we only awaken more insecurity in others by struggling to accumulate more power for ourselves. We appear to others like wolves, but in fact we are sheep in wolves' clothing — insecure, frightened, incapable of breaking out of this state of chronic anxiety.

The State of Nature

Now, what are we to do in order to achieve some kind of liberation? Hobbes says that we must first recognize our state of nature — the basis of our human condition, the kind of life that deep down we either all lead or could lead, and certainly do lead when something like civil war breaks out.

In the *Leviathan*, he sets forth what has become his famous description of the state of nature: "Hereby it is manifest that during the time men live without a common power to keep them in a state of security, they are in that condition which is called war — and such a war as is of every man against every man." This is not some distant state in our remote past. It is our potential, and when we do plunge into civil war, we know it.

He elaborates: "War consisteth not just in a battle or the act of fighting, but in a tract of time wherein the will to contend by battle is sufficiently known. And therefore the notion of time is to be considered in the nature of war, as it is in the nature of weather. For as the nature of foul weather lieth not in a shower or two of rain, but in an inclination thereto of many days together, so the nature of war consisteth not in actual fighting, but in the known disposition and inclination thereto. During all the time there is no assurance to the contrary, all other time can be called peace."

"Whatsoever therefore is consequent to a time of war, where every man is enemy to every other man — and which is worst of all — there is continual fear and danger of violent death." And then comes the most memorable line from Hobbes' *Leviathan* or any of his writings: "the life of man becomes solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short."

This might seem an egregious overstatement, but it is certainly an excellent description of what happened in England during Hobbes' own time, when civil war devastated that country. And it can describe the way in which the United States experienced civil war too, because from Hobbes' point of view, civil war is the worst form of violence — it generates the most insecurity: brother killing brother, father killing son. That kind of violence is, from Hobbes' point of view, so irrational and yet so natural. His diagnosis is that we are capable of this all the time.

The Natural Law and the Contract

The key point about the predicament is that, in fact, people want peace. Hobbes says there is a natural law that applies to humanity, stated as a precept — a general rule of reason — "that every man ought to endeavor peace as far as he has hope of attaining it," and that when he cannot obtain peace, "he seeks and uses all helps and advantages of war." That is our predicament. But it is only because we desire peace so fundamentally that we seek war in some misguided attempt to alleviate our insecurity.

This need — to express ourselves irrationally in the drive for inner security — has to be met somehow. And Hobbes' remedy is that it is to be met by entering into a contract that will give us a strong and powerful state. The contract is Hobbes' device. It certainly alludes back to the contract that you will remember in Plato's *Republic*,

where Glaucon had set forth such an idea — except that in Plato's *Republic*, Socrates refutes the idea of a contract, whereas in Hobbes' *Leviathan*, Glaucon's idea of a contract is taken very seriously and developed.

Hobbes says we must have a contract and we must set up a sovereign who will have full powers in order to keep this terrible state of anxiety and insecurity in a reasonable, moderate form. Because once it gets loose and is exacerbated, we fall into the vicious cycle of constantly producing more power that intimidates and threatens others. The sovereign is the solution — the leader who will manage to cool this anxiety as far as possible by establishing such power that the Leviathan, this great monster of a state, will keep us in a period of peace.

"The only way," he says, "to erect such a common power and so to achieve the common benefit is to confer all power and strength upon one man, or perhaps a small assembly of men." This will allow us to gain common peace and safety. Over and again he sets forth this goal of the state: to gain common peace and safety.

The contract reads: "I authorize and give up my right of governing myself to this man, to this sovereign in the Leviathan, on this condition, that thou give up thy right to him and authorize all of his actions in like manner." That is, everyone in the state gives up all their rights and surrenders them to this person, the sovereign. "This done, the multitude so united in one person is now called the commonwealth" — and this is the generation of the great Leviathan.

The Powers of the Sovereign

When we look at the powers conferred upon the sovereign in the *Leviathan*, we see that Hobbes is trying to buy peace at any price — and the price is extraordinary. The remedy for this state of chronic

anxiety, for the human predicament, is to set up an all-powerful state. In the second part of the *Leviathan*, Hobbes gives these powers to the sovereign.

First, the sovereign must execute the purpose and terms of the contract: to increase peace, to maintain security, to protect the populace at all costs, and to wage war only when absolutely necessary in self-defense, where the very survival of the state is clearly at stake. There are to be no wars of religion waged throughout Europe; wars are to be very carefully waged, if at all, and if they are waged too often, then the terms of the contract are broken and the sovereign is illegitimate, because his fundamental task is to keep the peace.

The sovereign also has absolute power to punish — to wield complete police power — to legislate all civil law, to ensure total obedience, and to distribute all property. And, crucially, the sovereign has the right to determine what is your property and what is his. That is, he has the prerogative to decide what is public property — property of the sovereign — and what is private property. As we shall see when we get to Locke, this is utterly anathema to him.

The sovereign has complete judicial power, meaning he is the judge of all doctrines and all opinions. He may censor whatever he deems necessary, including the censorship of religion. And finally, he has the power to appoint his own successor. These powers are so sweeping that we cannot conceive of any broader authorization.

Yet we must note this: there is one power that the sovereign does not have, and that is to unjustifiably and illegitimately take the life of his subjects, or to plunge his subjects into war — certainly into civil war, but also into international war — unless it is absolutely required. Some critics of Hobbes call him an authoritarian or a totalitarian. I do

not think he can be called this, because I believe he is arguing for a state that rules in the interest of each of its subjects — and that interest is to keep the peace and maintain maximum security.

Lecture 33: Spinoza — Rationalism and the Reverence for Being

Professor Darren Stalloff

Baruch Spinoza was, in many ways, one of the most challenging thinkers in the entire Western philosophical tradition, and that for a variety of reasons. His arguments are extremely abstruse and highly technical. Indeed, the text we are going to be looking at today, the *Ethics*, was offered as a geometrical proof, complete with axioms, definitions, deductions, propositions, scholia, and corollaries. It was intended to fulfill the sort of mathematical project that Descartes had introduced into modern philosophy. In that way, it is not an easy text to read by any stretch, and in many ways quite off-putting.

But there is more to the challenge of Spinoza than that. Spinoza's views are in many ways antithetical to what I would consider the mainstream cultural and intellectual tradition of Europe, and in a variety of ways I think he violates that mainstream. Spinoza is probably the first modern philosopher to completely reject the Judeo-Christian tradition and Judeo-Christian theology, and he did so in the name of science and reason. In that way, in the seventeenth century, Spinoza would exert a profound influence on the eighteenth century, particularly in the rise of rational or natural religion.

His rejection was not a mild one. He clearly scoffed at what he considered the mythic, childish views of Judeo-Christian cosmology. Indeed, he has the remarkable distinction of being a figure who was excommunicated not only by his own faith — the Jewish synagogue of Amsterdam — but by the Christian churches as well. And he was not quite a victim in this; he brought that fate on himself. He knew what the reaction to his teachings would be, and is reputed to have

lain down in front of the synagogue as a way of protesting the traditional beliefs of Judaism.

He also rejected any teleological interpretations of nature and of man — the sort of teleology and entelechy that was part of the Aristotelian tradition that Europe had inherited through scholasticism. He did so again in the name of the mechanistic science and rationalism of the seventeenth century. But in rejecting teleological interpretations of both nature and man — and it is critical that he sees humans as just another part of nature — he is in fact denying nature any ends or purposes whatsoever. The result is a view of nature that is purely mechanistic and purely deterministic, which is to say that metaphysics, as it were, becomes collapsed into physics. Human nature, as we will see, becomes susceptible to the same sort of scientific and mechanistic analysis that Descartes applied to animals.

Spinoza and Descartes

I mention Descartes because Spinoza was profoundly influenced by Descartes and his philosophy. Not surprisingly so — they are both rationalists. Descartes had spent much of his life in Amsterdam, had published many of his works there, and was roughly contemporaneous with the young Spinoza. Spinoza, if he did not know Descartes personally, certainly knew his works in great detail and was quite admiring of the Cartesian legacy.

It is important to recall a couple of critical features of Descartes' thought in order to understand Spinoza. First, you will recall the Cartesian epistemology arising from the *cogito ergo sum*. Descartes had argued that the first thing he could know with absolute certainty was that he existed because he was thinking. When he reflected on that knowledge, the only properties it had were that it was clear and

distinct. Hence the Cartesian epistemology of clear and distinct ideas: the more our ideas are clear and distinct, the more true they are. The other important part of the Cartesian legacy was his definition of substance — that which has a propensity to exist. Descartes had used that notion of substance to argue for metaphysical dualism: that the universe contained exactly two substances. The first was body, which followed the mechanical laws of physics and was characterized by purely quantitative properties — mass, shape, and volume, what is called extension. The second was another metaphysical realm, that of mind, which is unextended and is the realm of freedom.

Spinoza accepted Descartes' premises but rejected his conclusions. Spinoza believed that it was logically impossible for there to be more than one substance, that if you define substance as that which has a propensity to exist, then everything which exists makes up that substance. This tradition, unlike dualism, is called metaphysical monism — the belief that the universe is made of exactly one substance, one sort of stuff.

Spinoza referred to this one-world substance as, and I quote, "God or nature." That is an extremely interesting turn of phrase. He clearly means by it what we mean by nature today — that which physicists describe, a mechanistic and determined realm of quantity. But in calling that nature *God* at the same time, he is trying to provoke, I think, a quite profound pantheistic reverence: a reverence applied not only to the heavens, but to all of being. This is Spinoza's attempt to offer us a purely rational and scientific form of spiritual sustenance.

This is important because Spinoza's reputation in the popular culture of late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe was that of an atheist and a libertine, one whose mechanism was clearly meant to destroy the spiritual realm. And that, I think, is pretty clearly a result

of Judeo-Christian prejudice. Spinoza is a deeply religious thinker — indeed, perhaps even a mystical thinker. He is simply not Judeo-Christian. We might think of Spinoza as in fact trying to establish a form of religious reverence that allows us to keep a sense of our scientific conscience.

Rejecting Mind-Body Dualism: Attributes of One Substance

Let us look at Spinoza's rejection of Descartes' mind-body dualism. If he is going to argue that everything is one substance, how are we to account for the apparent difference between mind and body? We certainly seem to describe our mental activities differently from the way we describe purely physical activities. We refer to the motivations of our actions as being determined by our choices and our free will, as opposed to, say, a purely neurological description of what goes on between our ears. But Spinoza argues that mind and body make up one substance — being, nature, and God — and that they are in fact two different *attributes* of the same substance. That substance can be described as either extended or intellective.

That is, I know, a rather complicated and abstract doctrine. Let me try to flesh it out in a way that students and scholars of the early twenty-first century can understand. We might think of mind and body not as different substances, but as different descriptive protocols — different vocabularies, different ways of talking about the same sorts of events or phenomena.

Let me give a practical example. One could describe the lecture I am now giving in purely physical terms. Such a description would refer to my motion around the podium, the air moving through my larynx and vocal cords, perhaps the neural states being transmitted from my spinal cord to my limbs and governing my activities. We would

certainly recognize that as an accurate and true description. But we might also describe my lecture in terms of my motivations: what am I trying to teach you, why am I making the choices in terms of examples that I am, and how am I deploying those examples to try to bring clarity to your minds? And indeed, we could also describe it in yet another protocol — perhaps a psychoanalytic one. Am I trying to overcome anxieties over inadequacies by performing these lectures? Are you listening to them because of your own feelings of cultural inadequacy? Or quite the contrary, are you doing it on the basis of a pleasure principle — is this a sort of high cultural pleasure? We can see that there are a great many different ways of describing the same event.

But if that example was not clear enough, let me give you another — and my favorite one for describing this distinction — which is a chess game. We could describe a chess game in a variety of different ways. We could do it in terms of what is known as chess notation. In the older standard notation: white plays pawn to king four, black plays knight to king's bishop three. That is known as Alekhine's Defense. We could describe that simply by writing down that notation. We could also describe it in terms of the physical motion of matter: I lift a piece of matter, move it forward so many inches with so much mechanical force, and place it down; another person lifts another piece of matter, moves it forward and to the right a certain distance with a certain amount of force. Two different descriptions, same event. Let me add a third description, because that defense was actually played between Fischer and Spassky. We could describe it mentalistically and psychologically by saying that Bobby Fischer psyched the shoes off of Boris Spassky. He had played that defense, I think, some months previously in Buenos Aires against Spassky and had his head handed to him, and then in the midst of the world professional championship he opened with black using that defense — clearly psyching out his opponent, playing something unsound,

and saying in effect: you cannot beat me anyway. Are these different events, different substances, or one event described in different ways? Clearly the latter view is Spinoza's. Indeed, Spinoza went further and argued that being probably had an infinity of attributes, of which we are only aware of two: extension and the intellective.

Determinism

Now, given the Cartesian epistemological view that only intuitively clear and distinct ideas are true — because only clear and distinct ideas correspond to objective reality — Spinoza concludes that the causal nexus, since clear and distinct ideas map the world accurately, must be identical to what holds those ideas together in our mind. And what holds ideas together in our mind is the glue of inference, of logical implication. Spinoza therefore concludes that the causal nexus must be identical to logical implication, which is to say that causal explanations must be logically necessary, and all caused things must therefore be logically necessary. And since we know that every change and every event has a cause, we can conclude from that that everything in the universe is determined.

There are important implications to this. If all causes are determined by logical implication, then there is no fortune, no chance, no accident in the universe. The universe is entirely law-like in its behavior. So Spinoza is not only arguing for monism, he is arguing for a monistic determinism: there is one substance out there, and it follows mathematical and scientific laws. Such a view clearly does violate our sense of the Judeo-Christian interpretation of nature, one which is filled with purpose, and Spinoza accounts for this in the following way:

People look on all things of nature as means to their own advantage. And realizing that these were found, not produced by them, they

come to believe that there is someone else who produced these means for their use. So knowing that there are natural processes that serve us, we assume that there is a maker of those natural processes who made them to serve us — hence the origins of our belief in God.

For looking on things as means, they could not believe them to be self-created. But on the analogy of the means which they are accustomed to produce for themselves, they were bound to conclude that there was some governor or governors of nature endowed with human freedom who had attained to all their needs and made everything for their use. They also had to estimate the character of these rulers by their own, and so they asserted that the gods direct everything for man's use, so that they may bind men to them and be held in the highest honor by them. So it came about that every individual devised different methods of worshipping God as he thought fit, in order that God should love him beyond others and direct the whole of nature so as to serve his blind cupidity and insatiable greed.

This is a fairly sharp condemnation of Judeo-Christianity. It is stating that it not only arose out of superstition and ignorance, but in fact prospers on the basis of cupidity — that we continue to believe in the Judeo-Christian God because we want there to be a sort of sky-father who will look out for our interests and whom we can appeal to against our foes and competitors.

Consider, he continues, what has been the upshot:

Among so many of nature's blessings, they were bound to discover quite a number of disasters, such as storms, earthquakes, diseases, and so forth. And they maintained that these occurred because the gods were angry at the wrongs done to them by men, or the faults committed in the course of their worship.

In referring to the gods, Spinoza is giving us a hook with a barb at it. He is clearly trying to make us think he is decrying pagans. But in

fact, most Protestants and Catholics at the time Spinoza was writing believed in a providential interpretation of history which claimed that earthquakes were caused by God's anger, that famines were caused by God's anger — that God loved the New England Puritans, for example, because he killed all the Indians in epidemics, proof that God favored the new Israel over the old Canaanites, the Amerindians.

A Scientific Psychology: The Emotions

Since all natural events have a cause and humans are a part of nature, there is another painful inference to be drawn: all human actions are therefore determined in the same way that all of the rest of nature's actions are causally determined. This means that free will is not only a logical impossibility, it is actually absurd.

This is critical for Spinoza because he wants to offer, in the rest of his *Ethics*, after establishing his monistic determinism, a scientific psychology — one based on a deterministic view of human cognition and emotional life. As he says at the beginning of Part Three, *Concerning the Origins and Nature of the Emotions*:

Most of those who have written about the emotions and human conduct seem to be dealing not with natural phenomena that follow the common laws of nature, but with phenomena outside nature. They appear to go so far as to conceive man in nature as a kingdom within a kingdom. Again, they assign the cause of human weakness and frailty not to the power of nature in general, but to some defect in human nature — and here we see the Judeo-Christian doctrine of sin — which they therefore bemoan, ridicule, despise, or, as is most frequently the case, abuse. As far as I know, no one has defined the nature and strength of the emotions and the power of the mind in controlling them. I know indeed that the renowned Descartes, though he too believed that the mind has absolute power over its actions, does

explain human emotions through their first causes, and has also zealously striven to show how the mind can have absolute control over the emotions. But in my opinion, he has shown nothing else but the brilliance of his own genius, as I shall demonstrate in due course.

What Spinoza will do is, by positing one principle — which he calls *conatus*, an instinct or drive which we might characterize as desire (the same principle, by the way, that Hobbes had postulated and that Vico would postulate some ten or twenty years later) — and by invoking what he calls the principle of association, demonstrate that each of the emotions is a causally necessary or predictable response to external stimuli.

We could define love, then, as the desire for an object combined with the positive feeling we have about that object when associated with it. If we love a person, we associate the pleasures of that person's company with the person themselves, and that is what becomes love. Hate is obviously its inversion. Spinoza is able to take a first step in reducing all of our complex emotional states to fairly straightforward stimulus and response — to aversions, pain, pleasure, and desire — which is the strategy of modern scientific psychology. That is a very important breakthrough, and one that challenges our notion that somehow in our minds we are distinct from the rest of animal and natural creation.

The Path to Freedom and Salvation

It is now that I want to turn to what is really the central point of Spinoza's argument, both for determinism, for monism, and for the determinacy of emotional life. Spinoza wants to offer us a path to salvation — to emotional and psychological salvation. He argues that the well-being or happiness of humans is a function of their relative empowerment vis-à-vis their environment. This is an idea which in

many ways strikes us as Darwinian — the notion that a species, and each individual of that species, achieves well-being through control over its environment. It is also a doctrine that Nietzsche would make quite famous and call, in his own way, the will to power. But we will see that Spinoza uses this doctrine in almost the antithetical way that Nietzsche does.

For Spinoza, it is the capacity of the environment to induce powerful psychological states in us — what we call emotions — that is the real cause of human bondage and human suffering. Insofar as our emotional states and dispositions are determined by forces external to our own being, those events control us. Spinoza refers to such emotions as *passive*, in the sense that we are passive relative to our environment. Our environment controls us and determines our happiness. Consider the experience of road rage: it is a case where the actions of others are determining your own psychological states, and insofar as that occurs, you are experiencing relative weakness and bondage — you are enslaved by the driving habits of those around you.

I want to point out a historical affinity between this doctrine of Spinoza about passivity and the moral philosophy of Immanuel Kant a little over a hundred years later. Kant would call such passivity *heteronomy* — where the laws that determine your behavior are caused by things external to you. The opposite of that for Kant was *autonomy*, self-legislation, when your actions and psychological states, the maxims from which you act, result from your own internal convictions and are not determined by external forces. Spinoza calls the corresponding states *active emotions*, as opposed to passive emotions.

How do we achieve active emotions? The key is to use one's reason — to use reason to understand the necessity of one's emotions, to understand the psychological laws which determine our emotional

and dispositional states. That is a very interesting doctrine, because in a lot of ways it prefigures Freud. What Spinoza is arguing is that when you are subject to psychological determination by external forces, understanding that determination actually therapeutically helps you eliminate its control over your mind and body. This is what Freud called the talking cure — the ability to speak yourself into health, the idea that somehow knowing that you lack freedom actually gives you an element of freedom. Given this, we must assume that Spinoza's entire project is an attempt to offer us a road to freedom.

Human salvation, or as we might call it, blessedness, consists in understanding the necessity of each of the events that recur in our lives and facing each with equanimity. Now this may sound a great deal like Stoicism — the notion that one lives a life according to nature and is not phased by the actions of others and the environment. But Spinoza specifically rejects the Stoics, precisely because he does not think that their strategy can actually be fulfilled. No person can ever really achieve complete freedom. It is a question of relative freedom, of relative empowerment, of the relative ability to face fate with equanimity.

In fact, I would argue that if there is a closer analogy to Spinoza's position, it is actually that of the Buddha. The Buddha taught that life is suffering and that the cause of suffering is desire. That is very much Spinoza's view as well — it is our desires, when conjoined with the principle of association, that cause us to be pained by external phenomena. And I think very much like the Buddha, Spinoza is enjoining us both to understand the cause of our suffering — that it comes from within, not from the world outside — and to understand that the means of liberation is to arrive at a scientific realization of the nature of that determinacy. Only then can one achieve that relative freedom, which I think both Spinoza and the Buddha would

have agreed is equivalent to enlightenment. In both cases there is a deeply mystical strain.

Such an enlightened person would reverence being as a whole. They would not worship a particular fraction of being imaginatively held to be in the heavens, but would see God pantheistically in all of the world — in animals, minerals, vegetables, the starry heavens, as well as the mundane and everyday. One would find such divine power manifest in each enlightened person through a universal love, but a love that is rational — not the sort of love that Kant would describe as pathological, a sort of instinctual warm-heartedness, but a rational love based on an understanding of the nature of being itself, of an understanding of the nature of the universe.

Historical Influence

I want to conclude by talking a bit about Spinoza's historical influence, because he would influence a variety of different movements in various ways. Certainly he had a profound influence on other rationalists. G.W. Leibniz, one of his colleagues and, to some extent, friends, was clearly influenced by Spinoza's complete determinism in his own development of the principle of sufficient reason.

But his critique of providential interpretations of nature got quite a bit of traction in thinkers like Tillotson and Hoadly and other members of what was called latitudinarianism in England, and would become rational or natural religious speculation in the eighteenth century. Indeed, one might think of his mechanistic determinism as laying down the high ground towards which the Enlightenment metaphysic of materialism would be attracted.

One also sees obvious similarities between the social teachings of Spinoza and, for example, Bernard de Mandeville, and after him

Edmund Burke, in that they all accepted an evolutionary interpretation of the state and of moral action — one purely naturalistic — which rejected the social contractarianism associated with Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, and such contemporary figures as John Rawls.

But his pantheistic pietism would also have a profound influence. One is tempted to see a strong similarity between his thought in this regard and the great American philosopher and theologian Jonathan Edwards, who said that a true love — what John Coltrane would call a love supreme — must be a rational love of all of being. That is very much a Spinozistic point of view, and it is that pantheism and mysticism which would in fact inform much of the cosmology and metaphysical posture of the nineteenth-century romantics, who would see in Spinoza a sort of hero figure. There is a famous quote from Goethe capturing this perfectly: how respectable to find a man who would love God without expecting God to love him back. But again, to love God, for Spinoza, is to love all other living beings, including one's fellow creatures.

My concluding comment about Spinoza is this: as difficult and off-putting as his doctrines may seem, they have a peculiar appeal to people in times of trouble. When one cannot control one's environment, when one's will to power, as it were, is blocked by insurmountable social forces — as Spinoza's was; remember, Spinoza is a Sephardic Jew whose family had been exiled from Portugal — the seventeenth century, when Spinoza writes, is a moment of intense confessional struggle when Europe literally bleeds from its veins. At such a moment, to have a doctrine that says your happiness depends on your own psychological states and not on what goes on around you may be the only source of spiritual repose and sanity in a world which may seem to have gone mad.

Lecture 34: Pascal — Skepticism and Jansenism

Professor Alan Kors

Introduction: Fideism in the 17th Century

We lecture now on Blaise Pascal and the issues of skepticism and Jansenism.

As we have seen in several lectures, skepticism is another of the systematic philosophical assaults upon the dominance of the Aristotelian scholastic system still in control of the universities and institutions of the European intellectual world. There are very deep skeptical strains in the 17th century about the claims of human knowledge, and the dominant form of philosophical skepticism in the 17th century is what we term fideism — from *fide*, the root meaning faith. Fideism holds two central positions: that human knowledge cannot attain significant certainty, and that this weakness of human knowledge should convince us of our absolute dependence upon faith and upon God's grace.

There were two most influential fideists of the 17th century. We have already discussed one — Pierre Bayle, the French Huguenot Protestant — and now we shall discuss the second, in many ways the most deeply influential and unambiguously fideistic author of the 17th century: Blaise Pascal, a Catholic who becomes part of a movement within French Catholicism that we shall discuss, called Jansenism, from the doctrines of Bishop Jansen, who wrote a book on the subject of St. Augustine and Augustinian theology.

Pascal's Scientific Career

But before turning to Jansen, let us understand why Pascal's movement to fideism is of such particular drama for the 17th

century. That is because Pascal had achieved, starting as a child prodigy, a brilliant career on the frontiers of the new quantitative and mechanical sciences of the 17th century. This man who would become so symbolic of the denigration, the fatuity, and the indifference of the reach of human reason had enjoyed one of the most meteoric successes in the history of 17th century scientific accomplishment.

He had been a child prodigy in mathematics, and in the course of his young years he did foundational work on conic sections, on cycloid curves, on barometrics — the science of air pressure — on fluid dynamics, on pneumatics, and on the mathematical calculus of probability. To aid his father, who was a tax collector in Rouen, he even devised a mechanical calculating machine whose construction he oversaw, which many see as the first human computer — which is why one of the primary computer programming languages is named after him, Pascal.

But after his encounter with Jansenism, Pascal largely abandons his scientific career and will engage the centuries-old contest between piety and natural knowledge.

Jansenism: Augustinianism versus Thomism

Within Catholicism, Jansenism — which is strongest in France but which also makes very deep inroads in the Low Countries and in Italy — was a continuation of the contest between, in the simplest terms, Augustinianism, the religious doctrines of St. Augustine, on the one hand, and Thomism, the doctrines of St. Thomas Aquinas, on the other. Though both Jansenists and Thomists in the 17th century forever accused anyone who described the two positions of having misrepresented their own, it is safe to say that Jansenism looks upon the effects of the Fall upon human beings through the darkest

Augustinian lenses. The Fall — the separation of human beings from God in this world — has left us with a will that, unless acted upon by God's grace, is incapable of wanting or choosing the good, and with a reason that is incapable of any significant knowledge, including a rational understanding of its own weakness and its own dependence upon faith.

Jansenism also took the view that under the influence of, above all, the Jesuits, the Catholic Church in the 17th century had come to look upon the issue of God's grace as an issue primarily of participation in the sacraments of the Church. From the Jansenist perspective, the Jesuits and the Thomists had ignored the indispensability of a personal encounter between the sinner and Christ — Christ's love and forgiveness — and had substituted sacramental dispensation. Was one baptized? Did one take communion? Had one gone through the sacrament of marriage? Had one received last rites? But for the Jansenists, these were acts that only had religious significance if one had been truly touched by the grace of God, if one had relied upon the forgiveness of Christ, if one had had one's own night of despair and fire and turning toward God and participation in the sacrifice of Christ upon the cross through the election and grace of God.

A leading Jansenist thinker and a major Cartesian philosopher as well, Antoine Arnauld, wrote a book called *On Frequent Communion* in which he discussed what for him was the absolute scandal of frequent communion in the church of the 17th century. What was the church's operational view of grace and the sacrifice of Christ? Someone sinned all week, then went to confession, then was given a ritual penance and forgiveness, then took communion — participated in the sharing of the body and blood of Christ — and then on Monday began sinning again, and sinned all week, and went

to confession and received absolution, and took communion, and then began sinning again on Monday.

For Arnauld, for the Jansenists, for Pascal, Christ had not died on the cross to provide twelve hours of feigned virtue for people — to provide the means of a cycle of redemption and a return to sin. Christ died on the cross so that God could dispense His absolutely efficacious grace, His saving grace that would justify and sanctify, that would wash someone of sin, that would put someone in a state of grace with God. How dare these worldly, unchristian orders dominating the church — the Jesuits, the Dominicans, all Thomists from the Jansenist perspective — proclaim to the world that Christ's death on the cross and the dispensation of grace was not saving, was not efficacious?

The spectacle of frequent communion was intolerable both as an arrogance and above all as a denial of the very meaning and mystery of Christ's death. Further, from the Jansenist perspective, the Church by the 17th century had become so worldly. What did the Jesuits want above all? To be confessor to aristocrats, confessor to kings, confessor to dukes, confessor to the wealthy and powerful, who would bestow large gifts and foundations upon them — allowing those patrons to commit their worldly sins week after week while telling them that they were participants in the Church of God and in the grace of Jesus Christ.

The institutional church, from the Jansenist perspective, had forgotten the reality of sin, the awesome consequences of the Fall, the reality of grace and its meaning. Jansenism, at the urging of its enemies in France, would be condemned by the papacy, and the French Church — believing itself to have the right to accept or reject papal judgments — accepted that condemnation, which was also accepted by the King of France. From that moment on, Jansenism became the religious and political underground of France, a role it

would play right up to the French Revolution itself, over 130 years later.

The leading center of Jansenism was a convent at Port-Royal, where many thinkers such as Pascal would spend large parts of their year in writing, reading, prayer, and meditation. Port-Royal eventually would be razed to the ground by the monarchy of France. But it was there that Pascal became one of Europe's foremost apologists — that is, defenders — of Jansenism, Catholicism, and Christianity.

The *Pensées*: An Unfinished Apology

When Pascal died young in 1662, his friends at Port-Royal found his papers — an unfinished work of Christian apologetics that was in part ordered, in part developed, but often just scattered thoughts and observations that no one was certain how Pascal was going to arrange or how he was going to develop into a finished argument. His friends, the Jansenists at Port-Royal, arranged and edited his works, which were published as his *Pensées* — his thoughts on religion — a work that electrified a generation and has electrified European and indeed world readers ever since.

What are the themes of the *Pensées* and the nature of this work of apologetics, if we arrange it as an argument? It begins with the misery of man without God. For Pascal, look at the human condition — and almost all of it is an attempt to avoid being alone with one's own self, one's own consciousness, one's own awareness of one's life. All human effort is an attempt at what Pascal calls diversion, our desperate efforts to avoid the deepest question: who am I, and what is my fate? Because that question always leads us to an awareness of our misery and our depravity. The things we say to people whom we think we love, or whom we think are our friends — the bitter and hurtful things we do and say without being honest about our

motives. The things we know we must do with our life that we are unable to do. The things we know we must not do that we do again and again. And we will attempt any diversion to avoid confronting that question: who am I?

One looks at the misery of man without God and one sees simultaneously the real nature and the absurdity of the human condition. For example, what could be more absurd — but more real — than war? The national divisions that come down to this: on this side of the river, my friend; on that side of the river, my enemy. On this side of the river, if I kill, it is murder; on that side of the river, if I kill, it is just and heroic. What could simultaneously be more real than that as a part of our actual lives? But what could be more absolutely absurd? In this valley, my friend; on the other side of the mountain, my mortal enemy.

We understand that we are creatures of absurdity. What could be more real than power? And yet we must dress the king in ermine and purple and our judges in black robes and wigs, for without that costume we would find it absurd that they exercise judgment and authority. The king unclothed is unthinkable to us. What could be more real, but what could be more absurd, than that?

We pride ourselves on our ability to understand in this century, but we cannot make any sense of ourselves. Mankind is a mass of contradictions. We are simultaneously creatures of genius and ignorance. Someone who can produce the most extraordinary work in mathematics cannot walk over an abyss on a width of plank that he could walk anywhere else, because of the power of imagination. We have science without morality — capable of understanding the world, but incapable of using that knowledge in any manner consistent with the love of our fellow creatures. We have energy without purpose — that is virtually a definition of human life, energy without purpose. We have reason capable of the most extraordinary

science, and yet we are creatures of the most arbitrary custom. We are governed by custom, ruled by custom, yet capable of the highest scientific understanding. Why is one man a duke and another a commoner? It governs all of our lives — absolute, arbitrary custom — and yet the same creatures who study the heavens in astronomy cannot rid themselves of the empire of custom.

We are creatures of intellectual weakness as well. We have reason without sincerity. What an extraordinary thing to see people passionately arguing at their most rational with no sincerity whatsoever — what contradictory creatures we are. We are always under the influence of our passions and our prejudices. There we are, occupying one point in this cosmos, and yet we are unable to grasp intellectually either the infinitely large, which we cannot comprehend, or the infinitesimally small, which we cannot comprehend — yet we occupy a point between those two.

Pascal's Wager

Knowing our misery and knowing our weakness, what at least should we want to be true? Pascal is writing in an age in love with gambling — it is why there is so much work on probability in the 17th century. The 17th century gambles on everything. And Pascal says: you think you know what is important. Let us examine a certain wager and understand what in fact is the most important thing of all. You generation that loves to gamble — ponder this. Imagine a bet in which on one side there is no risk and the possibility of infinite gain, and on the other, no possibility of gain but a possibility of infinite loss. That would be the most interesting wager of which you could possibly be aware. That is the wager you face. That is the reality of religion.

God either exists or God does not exist. If you bet — if you wager your life — that God exists and you are right, you lose nothing, and there is the possibility of infinite gain. If you bet that God does not exist and you are right, you gain nothing. If you are wrong, you lose everything. Bet that God exists: if you are right, gain everything and lose nothing. Bet that God does not exist: if you are right, gain nothing; if you are wrong, lose everything. If there is one wager you should want to be able to make, it is on God.

That is not a proof, Pascal insists — it is not a proof at all. But it is an incitement to want to know, and it is a demonstration of what really matters to you.

Knowledge of God versus Knowledge of Christ

But knowledge of God without knowledge of Christ is absolutely insufficient, because the world still makes no sense to us. Imagine that God created a world just as Descartes described. So what? There is still the misery of man, the contradictions and absurdity of life, incomprehensible to us. That the world had a creator? Fine — but so what? What does it resolve? What does it answer for you? Without the knowledge of Christ, knowledge of God is a barren, empty philosophical doctrine about a first cause, irrelevant and unimportant to human life.

But faith and Christian revelation change everything. There are arguments, but they will not convince you, because one does not believe in Christ through the mind — one believes in Christ through the heart. There were miracles, there were prophecies fulfilled, but those will not tempt you at all, because the mind rejects what is good and the will rejects what is good. But if one is touched in one's heart by grace, the heart has its reasons which reason cannot

comprehend. And the world finds it absurd — the Christian who believes by faith and by grace. But here is what happens.

Have you ever looked at a trick picture, Pascal asks. You look at it, and you look at it, and it looks like one thing — and then you change your perspective. You look at it from another angle, and suddenly you realize it is a picture of something else entirely. That is what Christian faith accomplishes. When you understand the Fall, you understand the absurdity and misery and dualism of human life. You understand why we are contradictions of the exalted and the base, the wise and the ignorant, the profound and the depraved.

When you understand the sacrifice — the crucifixion, the blood, the grace of Christ — then that there is a God, and that this is the world merited by the Fall, and that there is a love that surpasses all understanding, all makes sense. Of that world that formerly was incomprehensible, with faith our contradictions and unhappiness, our greatness and our depravity, this world and God's goodness all fall into place.

Not physics, not the study of air pressure, not philosophy — none of these things is the goal of life. Inner peace and salvation are the goals of life. And those are matters of grace, the heart, and Christian faith.

Lecture 35: Pierre Bayle — Skepticism and Calvinism

Professor Alan Kors

Introduction: The Shifting Reputation of Pierre Bayle

We shall lecture now on Pierre Bayle and the issue of skepticism and Calvinism. Pierre Bayle is a dramatic lesson in how fleeting fame can be. He was one of the most widely known and influential authors of the 17th century, celebrated throughout the 18th century, who has fallen into remarkable public obscurity in the 20th century — when scholarly interest in him, however, has risen to new heights.

His appeal is very difficult to overstate. His works are bestsellers in the 17th century. He is the editor of a scholarly journal of book reviews and commentary that is among the most widely circulated works in the erudite world of the 17th century. And his reputation in the 18th century is the subject of constant discussion among the new philosophers of that age. He is also a figure who illustrates particularly well the tensions and dilemmas of 17th century thought, because he is read and appropriated so diversely and differently, and because his reputation will undergo such a remarkable evolution. Let us begin there — with Bayle's contemporaneous 17th century reputation and then his later reputation — which will introduce us to the dilemma of Pierre Bayle.

During his lifetime, Pierre Bayle is above all known as a thinker of the Calvinistic French Huguenot community. The Huguenots were the French Calvinists, expelled from France and settled in one of their major centers of refuge, Rotterdam. Throughout his lifetime he is known as a leading Calvinistic thinker. He has critics who argue that in fact his arguments are dangerous and that perhaps he is secretly an enemy of the faith. But he teaches in Protestant seminaries,

participates in the most intense Calvinistic communities and debates, and he is known among those who know him best as a deeply religious and pious man.

Within one generation, the freethinkers of the French Enlightenment above all will have appropriated him as a secret enemy of Christianity, as one of their own forebears — at the same time, paradoxically, that in German pietistic communities he is celebrated as one of the leading Protestant thinkers. At the ultra-Orthodox Calvinist Academy at Neuchâtel in Switzerland, throughout the 18th century, his works are given to the best pupil as an award at the end of each year.

But by the mid-18th century, the culture will know him as Pierre Bayle the freethinker, Pierre Bayle the enemy of religion, and even in some circles Pierre Bayle the friend of atheism. And it is that reputation — Bayle as freethinker, as rationalist, as precursor of the French Enlightenment — that will dominate until the mid-20th century, when there is a great flowering of scholarly interest in Pierre Bayle given his influence, and people rediscover the deep Calvinism and Calvinistic context of his life in the French Huguenot community and the contemporaneous religious responses to and implications of his positions and his debates.

One of the things that occasions the scholarly interest in Bayle in the mid-20th century, and that will lead to the rediscovery of Bayle in his Huguenot Calvinist context, is a brief flurry of interest in quantitative intellectual history. At mid-century, people became interested in things that you could count as historical evidence. Surveys were done of private libraries in 18th century France. Each time an estate had to go through the courts — through probate — there was an inventory of books. This gave historians a remarkable repository of evidence about what was owned and read. It turned out that Pierre Bayle's works, and in particular his work *The Historical and Critical*

Dictionary, was the most widely owned book in all 18th century French private libraries. That discovery led to a great flurry of scholarly interest, which has brought the study of Bayle back to the center of 17th century intellectual history.

Bayle's Central Project: Humbling Reason to Exalt Faith

What makes Bayle such a problematic figure in terms of this evolution of his reputation is the danger of the goal he adopted in his lifetime — a pious but very problematic goal: to humble human reason and to show our absolute dependence upon faith. And to accomplish that, Pierre Bayle set out to demonstrate the incompatibility of reason and faith. What could more show our dependence upon faith for religious belief than to show the non-rational foundations of Christian thought? What could more humble human reason than to show that human reason led arrogantly to a rejection of the foundations of humble Christian belief?

One can understand, given that project of Pierre Bayle's — the humbling of reason and the exaltation of faith by arguing the incompatibility of the two — one can understand how that accounts both for his place at the center of 17th century religious debate and his later appropriation as a precursor of the French Enlightenment.

Bayle's Life and Calvinist Context

What we know about Pierre Bayle convinces us that his religious sincerity — and above all the sincerity of his connection to Huguenot Calvinism, French Protestant Calvinism — is beyond question. Pierre Bayle was deeply beloved by his family and very close to the Protestant family in which he was born. He converted from

Protestantism to Catholicism as a young man, an act that separated him from those he most loved. He then engaged, after long religious meditation, in a very dangerous reconversion from Catholicism to the Reformed Protestant faith in France, which made him a heretic of the worst kind in Catholic France — someone who had known God's truth in the Catholic Church and had abandoned it, having once possessed it, for the religion of his birth. It led him to flee France and teach in Protestant academies, at Sedan. He spent long years as a Calvinist teacher. When Louis XIV's armies took Sedan, Pierre Bayle fled to Rotterdam. His own brother died in the prisons of Louis XIV in Catholic France. And he then engaged in decades as a leading Calvinist polemicist, occupying a central place in the divisions of European Calvinism and apologetics and in debates with Catholic theology.

He also occupied a very central place in the world of 17th century erudition and debate. He believed that one had to follow critical reason as far as it could take one, at which point one understood one's dependence upon faith for ultimate beliefs — but that following of critical reason as far as one could led to many a shock in his work.

In his lifetime, Europe found him a provocative and controversial thinker, arguing among other things that many pagan superstitions had remained within Christianity, and that the confusion of philosophical issues with issues of faith — rather than grounding belief in conscience and Scripture — worked to the detriment of both critical reason and, above all, of faith. He became known as one of Europe's foremost proponents of religious toleration, arguing that there could be no act more arrogant, more reflective of a pride absolutely incompatible with Christian humility, than to have such confidence in one's own beliefs that one would coerce the

conscience of another human being, or persecute or imprison or torture or kill that other human being.

A Catholic apologist and skeptic of the late 16th century, Michel de Montaigne, had said something that Bayle took very much to heart. Montaigne had phrased it this way: it takes an extraordinary amount of confidence in one's own beliefs to burn another human being at the stake for them. For Pierre Bayle, that kind of arrogance was incompatible with Christian humility and incompatible with Christian love. He set out to humble the arrogance of those theologians who, rather than trusting to all that one could trust to — one's private conscience and the hope of being a recipient of grace and true faith, rather than clinging to that Christian moment of possible salvation — arrogantly prosecuted others in the name of beliefs that he would show they could not even rationally defend.

The Historical and Critical Dictionary

His most influential work was his *Historical and Critical Dictionary*, volumes in which very banal narrative text in each article — historical, religious, philosophical — is accompanied by lengthy footnotes comprising some ninety percent of each article, in which major philosophical or erudite debates occur. In this work, Bayle undertakes his voyage of erudition and the search for truth via a critical reason that comes to recognize its own dependence upon faith.

Let us look at one of the articles that the Enlightenment would later read as a precursor of freethinking, but that had a very different meaning in Bayle's context: his article on King David, which shocked, intrigued, and delighted his contemporaries. The narrative of the article simply tells the story of David's life as recounted in Scripture. And in the footnotes we learn again and again that David was a

murderer, a thief, an adulterer — and beloved by God. That one could not make sense of that rationally. But one knew by faith that God's choices, elections, and actions were not man's, and that it was not man's place to judge of God's ultimate things and decisions.

The article on King David shocked people because it laid out at extraordinary length the crimes of King David, and rather than seeking to justify or rationalize them as consistent with human natural virtue — as so many theologians had attempted to do — Bayle, without flinching, discussed his adultery, his covering himself with young naked virgins, his sending the husbands of women after whom he lusted to their death, his period as a thief and as a traitor, his lying, his committing the most unspeakable crimes — and yet Scripture assured us he was someone beloved by God, which everyone understood to mean someone chosen and elected by God, someone who was saved.

David, Jurieu, and the Politics of Toleration

Let us put the article in context. Pierre Bayle was living in Rotterdam in the midst of a French Protestant community that had been outlawed and exiled from France, that had suffered untold miseries during persecutions, and whose leaders were attempting to forge a European coalition — a Protestant coalition, with Holland at its core — to bring down Louis XIV, to overthrow him. Bayle preached tolerance and pacifism: that the Christian could not take up arms, that the Christian could not depose or execute a king. What did those debates look like?

The leader of the Huguenot community, one of Bayle's eventual deep adversaries, was a leading theologian named Pierre Jurieu. And his sermons on King Louis XIV of France took this form: most kings, indeed, we are commanded to obey in Scripture — they are given to

us by God. But look at King Louis: he is a murderer, he is a liar, he is a thief, he is an adulterer. We are therefore rid of any obligation of pacifism or of obedience to him. Now replay Bayle's article on David in your mind. What is David? Everything that Louis XIV is described as being — and yet he is an anointed king, given to a nation by God.

David and the Mystery of Calvinist Election

Let us look at the article on David in yet another religious context. One of the arguments that Catholic apologists often directed against Orthodox Calvinism was that the Calvinist — believing in God's predestination of who is saved and who is damned, that God's choice of the elect is a mystery unknowable by the study of human behavior — was in effect telling people that even the worst sinner could be someone saved and beloved by God, whereas the most pious Christian who gave money to charity, who attended services, who was active in the life of the church, could be damned. Many Calvinist apologists began to back away from this and say that those who were justified by God's grace and sanctified — made holy by God's grace — would have external marks of their sanctification, of their being saved, justified, and made holy.

For Pierre Bayle, Saint Augustine and Calvin had had it right the first time. Salvation was a mystery beyond human comprehension. There was no natural philosophy that was going to unravel and understand the mystery — beyond mystery — of God's love and salvation. Someone could be justified and saved through the blood of Christ without having marks that allowed natural human judgment to say, we know that God has saved this man and damned that man — and this would not allow anyone to say, I know by the marks of my character that God has saved me and damned my neighbor.

Now replay the article on King David in one's mind, for what it explicitly stresses is the absolute Christian mystery of salvation, justification, and sanctification. It was precisely beyond human comprehension that God should save anyone, and whom God saved was at the election of God, not open to the judgment and scrutiny of man. David had done all of these crimes, but David was beloved by God. What is the intellectual lesson here? That in understanding the mysteries we have only faith — whatever the scandal to those who do not have faith. But had not Scripture itself told us that what was wisdom to the Christian would be folly to the world, that the pagan would never understand, that the philosopher would never understand, that we were Christians by faith?

But if there is to be faith, then we have an obligation to natural judgment when we use our natural reason. That alone allows faith. So the Christian must say: by natural lights, David is a sinner. By natural lights, David has committed unspeakable crimes — and we declare them to be such. But it is revealed to us in Scripture that he was beloved by God. How could God do that? Who was a human being to put natural reason to that question? Who were human beings to judge the justice or injustice, the goodness or evil, of the deity who by faith is justice, who by faith is goodness, independent of all human judgment?

The Manichean Articles and the Problem of Evil

Bayle set out in the *Dictionary* to make that point with dramatic effect in his articles on the Manicheans, a heresy that argued the world was divided between two powers — one infinitely good, one infinitely evil — that warred with each other. Bayle set out to argue in those articles that the Christian philosopher or theologian could not overcome the Manichean in debate. The person who said "I do not

see uniform good in the world" could not be convinced, Bayle would write, by evidence in one article on the subject, by logic in another, or by reason in any form in yet another — from the suffering of the world, from the fact that an infinitely good God allowed evil and the triumph of wickedness in the world. One could not conclude by natural reason for the goodness of God, but by faith the Christian knew the goodness of God. Only faith resolves the paradoxes of the coexistence of evil and suffering with God's omnipotent power and infinite goodness. Reason never can accomplish that.

Christianity is filled with such paradoxes. Reason cannot understand the Trinity — and the Enlightenment loved to quote Bayle on the problem of God's goodness and the problem of the Trinity. But Bayle also accepted the Greek skeptical paradoxes on motion, leading to the conclusion that there could be no motion in the world — that everything must always be in one place at one time, and hence no motion was possible — and Bayle was not averse to the new physics either. Reason was simply too weak to understand ultimate things.

Bayle's Skepticism: Humility, Tolerance, and Faith

Bayle's skepticism is directed against all intellectual confidence. What resolves the tensions of belief for Bayle is humility, tolerance, and the quiet belief by faith and by the best lights of one's own conscience. Bayle was opposed often by outraged theologians. He so consistently tried to demonstrate the mystery of Christian faith and the danger of superstition in Christianity when it departed from simple faith. He wrote with shame of Christian fear of comets, of Christian acceptance of witchcraft manias and persecutions — these had no place in the quiet faith and critical reason of the Christian. When Christians argued that there was universal consent to God's goodness, Bayle said that before Christianity there was universal

consent to polytheism or to a denial of a God of three persons — universal consent meant nothing; faith meant everything.

The atheist and the Christian could be equally virtuous, for Pierre Bayle. That was an historical reality. It was not human belief but the grace of faith that saved. For Pierre Bayle, the crucial need always was to avoid the overextension of human claims and to hold to the simple faith, by conscience, of a Christian.

Conclusion: Bayle Misread by the Enlightenment

But he is writing about the incompatibility of reason and faith at just that moment when a tidal change is occurring in the culture that will affect the perception of his writings. Given a culture increasingly swept away in confidence in the new philosophy, in reason, in science, and in evidence, Bayle is read as irreligious. His article on David gives rise to Voltaire's own article on David a generation later, discussing what Voltaire frames as the absurdity of Christian ethics. Bayle's notion of faith persists, but it is occurring on a wave of naturalization and rational commitment in a culture that is rapidly abandoning the belief that Bayle himself holds — that the world is only clear religiously when reason's limits are fully recognized.

Thank you.

Lecture 36: Newton and Enlightened Science

Professor Alan Kors

Newton's Education at Cambridge

We shall talk now about Sir Isaac Newton and the emergence of enlightened science at the end of the 17th and the dawn of the 18th century. The education of Isaac Newton is interesting in and of itself. He entered Trinity College, Cambridge University, in 1661. Every other college at Cambridge was dominated by the Aristotelian scholastics, but Trinity College, Cambridge, was the one college in the university that was a Cartesian stronghold. And that had a profound influence on the education of Isaac Newton, because he was introduced to Descartes as an undergraduate — to Descartes' mathematics in particular. Descartes had founded analytic geometry, which made extraordinarily easier the sorts of calculations in which Kepler had engaged. Newton thus, early on, was a student both of Descartes' mechanical philosophy and of higher mathematics.

The Eighteen Months at Woolsthorpe

Shortly after receiving his bachelor's degree at Cambridge, Newton had to abandon the university because of the plague, which emptied the university as people went to their various homes. Newton spent eighteen months in the countryside at Woolsthorpe — an unparalleled eighteen months, I think, in the history of human thought — during which time he did nothing less than alter the history of the world.

What were the accomplishments of Newton's eighteen months in Woolsthorpe following the receipt of his bachelor's degree? First, he was thinking about the problem of astronomy — the orbit of the

Moon, what kept it in that orbit — when, in fact, I am pleased to report, for such stories rarely are true, an apple did fall as he was sitting thinking about astronomy in a field. Newton began to speculate on what would be the nature of a force that accounted, at one and the same time, for the Moon maintaining an orbit around the Earth without falling closer, and the apple falling from the tree toward the center of the Earth. Assume that these were the same force. What would that force be, and what could it account for?

He worked his way to the view that there was a force that varied directly according to two masses anywhere in the universe, and that varied inversely according to the square of the distance between them. To work out his calculation in terms of the Earth, the Moon, and the solar system, he needed a precise and accurate account of the circumference of the Earth. But he did not have his books with him, and he put down the wrong figure. As he related it, he very nearly had solved the problem — in fact, he had arrived at the law of gravity — but did not know himself to have done so. And, quite typical of Isaac Newton, when he returned to the university, he put those papers in a drawer and forgot about them for twenty years. He was someone who often forgot to take meals unless reminded.

In order to work out that theory of a force of gravity, Newton had to arrive at an understanding of the essential laws of mechanics that governed matter in motion — the nature of velocity and time and acceleration, the nature of inertia, which he now articulated as *linear* inertia: that matter, unless acted upon by another force, if moving in a straight line continued in a straight line, and if at rest remained at rest. And his third law of motion: that for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. So Newton had discovered the law of gravity and laid the foundation, with his three laws of motion, for the future of Western physics.

In order to deal with the multivariables of time, motion, mass, and distance, analytic geometry was insufficient, and so Newton also created the infinitesimal calculus. Interested in finding things to fill his mind during the eighteen months, he began experimenting with a prism on the nature of light, and with his experimental discovery of the composition of light laid the foundation of modern optics — the science of light. He also did work that changed the nature of mathematical understanding of numerical series. So in eighteen months in the countryside, in his early twenties, Isaac Newton had discovered the law of gravity, laid the foundation of modern physics with his three laws of mechanics, created the infinitesimal calculus, founded the science of modern optics, and advanced the frontiers of mathematical understanding.

Return to Cambridge: The Calculus and Isaac Barrow

When he returned to Cambridge, he spoke about this work to almost no one. And in fact it was almost by chance that he showed his work on the calculus to his professor, Isaac Barrow, who held the leading chair in mathematics in Great Britain. Seeing Newton's work, Barrow immediately resigned his chair in favor of his young student — probably the last time that that will ever happen in the history of higher education.

The Road to the *Principia*

Nearly twenty years later, in 1684, a group of scientific minds — Edmund Halley, Sir Christopher Wren, and Robert Hooke — were discussing the problem of gravity in a coffee house in London. They were trying to come to terms with what Newton had been thinking about some twenty years before: the problem of falling objects and the orbits of the planets. And they were confronted with the problem

bequeathed by Huygens' work on centrifugal force — the swinging globe. This is extremely interesting in light of Newton's formulation of inertia as linear: that motion occurs in a straight line unless acted upon by another force. All Western science, from the Greeks through the 17th century, had agreed that the circle was a natural inertial motion — that seemed to make sense of the heavenly bodies and their motions and of so much of the world. But Huygens' work on centrifugal force revealed that if you swing a globe attached to a chain or string around your head, get it going in a perfect circle, and then let go, it does not continue moving in a perfect circle. It flies off in linear motion. And Newton had indeed been working on the problem of the orbit of the Moon and of the planets precisely as a search for a force that acted as the chain does for the swinging ball — what would be the force that could alter, acting upon linear inertial motion, the movement of a planet into an orbit?

Wren, Halley, and Hooke were thinking on this same problem, but found the mathematics far too difficult. They had heard that there was a great mathematician at Cambridge, Isaac Newton, and they sent Edmund Halley down to see him. Halley asked Newton what he thought would happen to the orbits of the planets and the Moon if there were a force that acted upon them according to the two masses and in inverse proportion to the square of the distances between them — which was what the data suggested, but what they could not prove. And Newton immediately said they would be elliptical orbits as described by Kepler. Halley said, "How do you know that?" And Newton said, "Oh, I had pretty nearly worked it out some twenty years ago." Halley said, "Where — where are the papers?"

Newton began rummaging through drawers. As one historian of science put it, all of Europe was looking for an explanation of the heavenly orbits, and Isaac Newton had lost it. When he found the

papers, Halley saw that Newton had plugged in a wrong figure for the circumference of the Earth, and that with the right figure, everything in the cosmos fell into place. Halley was beside himself, and at his own expense and at his urging, he led Newton to develop his general system of the laws of motion and the law of universal gravitation. These were published in 1687 as the *Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica* — the *Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy* — better known simply as the *Principia*.

The work was published in Latin. The mathematics were of a difficulty that almost no one in England or on the continent could follow, and yet the work was an absolute watershed in the history of science and indeed in the history of our culture.

The Scientific Achievement of the *Principia*

Newton's *Principia* was a mathematical demonstration of the Copernican hypothesis as proposed by Kepler. I had said during our lecture on Galileo that Galileo rejected Kepler's laws of planetary motion because they had not been demonstrated. In one sense of demonstration, one might say they don't get demonstrated until the space program, when things actually land on the Moon based on calculations from Keplerian models. But in another sense, it is Newton's *Principia* that offers the scientific demonstration of Kepler's laws and the Copernican model. Assume the law of gravity — that there is a force proportional to the product of two masses divided by the square of the distance between them — and assume linear inertia, and the Copernican solar system, precisely as described by Kepler's laws of planetary motion, follows necessarily.

And that theory not only predicts the very universe open to our experimental gaze, but it predicts as well the behavior of tides, the reappearance of comets, and in short huge ranges of phenomena

that had seemed inexplicable to the human mind. Readers of the *Principia* who could not follow its demonstrations could read its predictions, could learn that those predictions held and were experimentally confirmed. Readers of the *Principia* could see Newton's demonstration of why all other physical systems that had been proposed — including Descartes' — would lead to a different universe than the universe we actually observe. And they were convinced by popularizers, by the word of experts, and by the drama of predictions that come true, that Newton had accurately described the world and the forces that governed it, and that for the first time the human mind understood the system of the world in which it found itself.

This means that Newton also convinced a culture that the world was ordered, lucid, and knowable — that the human mind was capable of understanding the architecture and design of God in the creation by means of a quantitative physical science. And the role of Newton's predictions in convincing even those who could not understand his work led to a moment of cultural and scientific enthusiasm the likes of which we rarely see in the history of the world.

Edmund Halley, a sober astronomer, penned an ode as a preface to Newton's *Principia* that concluded: "*Nearer the gods no mortal may approach.*" Alexander Pope, the great British poet, penned Newton's epitaph, still visible in Westminster Abbey. It reads:

Nature and nature's laws lay hid in night.

God said, "Let Newton be!" and all was light.

A hundred years later, Napoleon asked his great court astronomer whether there would ever be another Newton. He answered: "No, sire, for there was only one universe to be discovered." That is an extraordinary sense of Newton's work and accomplishment that the late 17th and 18th centuries possessed.

The Newtonians Versus the Cartesians

But not all who read Newton were impressed. One of the most illuminating and influential debates in the history of Western thought, philosophy, and science is that between the Newtonians and the Cartesians.

The Cartesians, recall, had wanted to strip the Aristotelian universe of what they saw as its magic and superstitious explanations, and to substitute a mechanistic explanation in which we understood all problems of physics as problems of the communication of force by matter in motion to matter in motion. For the Cartesians, the only way that force could be communicated from one part of matter to another was by direct contact. Think of a billiard table: you walk in during a highly complicated shot and you infer — because there is no magic, there are no secret occult forces — from the motion of things, what balls struck what balls, going back to the original cue shot. God's original cue shot being the one of interest. The universe of matter in motion that we observe is the result of just such a chain of direct mechanical contact.

For the Cartesians, the Newtonian explanation of gravity as *action at a distance* — two masses with nothing between them affecting each other with gravitational pull — sounded dangerously like the Aristotelians and their so-called occult forces in nature. When Cartesian mechanists made fun of Aristotelian explanations, they did so in the following manner: in Molière's *Le Malade Imaginaire*, there is a scene at an Aristotelian school of medicine where the doctoral candidate is asked, "Why does opium put one to sleep?" And he answers, "Because of its dormitive power." And they all respond, "Learned, learned, learned!" That is what Newtonian gravity sounded

like to the Cartesians. "Why do the planets hold their orbits?" "Because of their gravitational power."

In the Cartesian universe, everything is a problem of fluid mechanics. They were certain that between all the planets, the Earth, and the Moon there is a fluid, and that we are dealing with whirlpools of motion that can be understood in terms of the direct communication of force by matter to matter. Action at a distance seemed to them nothing but a return to occult forces.

Originally, Newton himself wanted an explanation of *how* gravity could operate — of how that force could be communicated. Was it magnetism, for example? But unable to derive gravity from anything else, Newton made a virtue out of a necessity, explaining that natural philosophy — science — can only demonstrate that a certain force operates in the world, not *why* or *how*. For the Cartesians, an explanation of how the world operates should account for how the world came to be this way in the first place. For the Newtonians, this was the universe that God created, and these were the laws that governed it — and it could be demonstrated that these were the laws that governed it. Asked "How can this law operate? Why should this law operate?", Newton replied that science should not feign hypotheses. It should not make things up. It should admit ignorance when it does not have data — an argument that, as we shall see, John Locke builds deeply into his own theory of knowledge: that absent experimental data, one admits ignorance.

Newton's Religious Vision

But Newton also loved the universe that he had discovered, for he was a deeply religious man. And he was appalled by the Cartesian notion that God had to create a universe of fixed mechanical laws — that God had to proceed in a certain way, that God's will necessitated

that there be inertial motion in the world. For Newton — and this is one of the goals accomplished by his science for him personally — the system of the world is a demonstration of God's omnipotence and freedom, in contrast to the necessity under which Descartes' God labored, having to do things this or that way in order to be rational and perfect. For Newton, the universe was comprehensible. *Why* these were the laws that God had chosen was known to God alone. Science did not penetrate beyond experience and knowledge of how nature operated and what laws governed it, to *why* that should be the case.

Newton indeed wrote more about Scripture and religious chronology than he did about physics and astronomy. He was a deeply religious man — what we would now call a Unitarian, and very unorthodox in his Christianity — and he found a powerful dimension of his science to be its demonstration of God's omnipotence, freedom, and wisdom. For Newton, the design of the universe proved the existence of God. He reasoned that if matter had been placed differently in the world, at different velocities, there would be a gravitational collapse of all matter. But observing what appeared to be a static universe, he saw in the placement and velocities chosen by God the evidence of a design that had avoided gravitational collapse — a proof of God's design and existence. We saw, through nature, to nature's laws and to their author, God. This meant that nature was lawful and knowable and that all knowledge was a form of piety — a closeness to the majesty of God.

Newton's Legacy

But Newton's greatest legacy to his civilization is that which Alexander Pope understood: a sense that all could be order, clarity, and light. Newton, by the success of his method, bequeathed a great

confidence in the method by which he had reached his conclusions — observation, induction, the mathematization of motion, quantitative rather than qualitative knowledge, predictive value, and experiment. God did not intend us for ignorance. We now had a method by which to use our minds, and for so many in Europe this was a model that could now be extended to the whole of natural knowledge.

Thank you very much.

Coda to Part III: From the Renaissance to the Age of Reason

Part III marks one of the great turning points in the history of Western thought. If the Christian Age was defined by the effort to harmonize faith and reason within a unified vision of reality, the period we have just explored is characterized by a growing willingness to question inherited authorities and to ask whether human beings might discover truth through new methods of inquiry. The thinkers of the Renaissance and the Age of Reason did not simply reject the past. Most of them revered it. Yet they increasingly believed that genuine understanding required something more than the repetition of established doctrines. It required investigation, criticism, and the courage to begin again.

The transition began with the Renaissance humanists, whose recovery of classical texts reopened intellectual possibilities that had long been filtered through medieval institutions. Their motto, *ad fontes* ("back to the sources"), expressed a conviction that wisdom might be renewed by returning directly to foundational texts rather than relying exclusively upon accumulated commentary. This recovery of antiquity did not destroy the medieval synthesis, but it loosened its grip. Ancient Greece and Rome became living interlocutors once again rather than merely historical authorities.

At the same time, profound political and social changes transformed Europe. The emergence of stronger nation-states, the expansion of commerce, the discovery of new worlds, the invention of printing, and the religious upheavals of the Reformation all contributed to an atmosphere of intellectual instability. Old certainties no longer seemed secure. Yet for many thinkers, uncertainty was not merely a problem. It was an opportunity.

Machiavelli exemplifies this shift. His willingness to examine politics as it actually functions rather than as moral philosophy imagined it should function represented a startling departure from earlier traditions. The question was no longer simply, "What is the just state?" but "How does power operate in the real world?" Political realism entered Western thought with a force that would never disappear.

The scientific revolution deepened this transformation. Figures such as Copernicus, Kepler, Galileo, and Newton challenged ancient cosmologies and demonstrated that nature could be understood through observation, mathematics, and experiment. The universe increasingly appeared not as a symbolic hierarchy reflecting divine purposes at every level but as an intelligible system governed by discoverable laws. Human beings acquired a new confidence in their capacity to understand the natural world.

Few thinkers embodied that confidence more completely than Francis Bacon. His vision of systematic inquiry, collaborative research, and the practical application of knowledge helped establish the foundations of modern science. Knowledge was no longer valued solely for contemplation. It became a tool for transforming the human condition. The ancient ideal of wisdom was increasingly joined by a modern ideal of progress.

Descartes carried this ambition into philosophy itself. Confronted by uncertainty, he sought a foundation so secure that doubt could not overturn it. His method of radical skepticism was intended not to destroy knowledge but to rebuild it upon indubitable principles. From the famous certainty of the thinking self, he attempted to reconstruct an entire system of philosophy. In doing so, he established many of the questions that would dominate modern thought for centuries.

Yet the philosophers of this era did not agree on what reason could achieve. Rationalists such as Descartes, Spinoza, and Leibniz emphasized the power of intellect to discover necessary truths. Empiricists increasingly stressed the role of experience and observation. Political theorists debated the origins of authority, the nature of rights, and the legitimacy of government. Religious thinkers struggled to reconcile traditional faith with emerging scientific worldviews. Beneath the confidence of the Age of Reason lay unresolved tensions that would only become more apparent with time.

Indeed, the most enduring lesson of Part III may be that every attempt to establish certainty generates new questions. The methods developed by modern thinkers were astonishingly successful. Science advanced. Political theory evolved. Philosophical inquiry became more rigorous. Yet the very tools that produced these achievements also undermined many inherited assumptions. Critical reason proved difficult to contain. Once authority could be questioned, everything became open to examination.

This brings us naturally to Part IV.

The Enlightenment inherits the intellectual revolutions of the Renaissance and the Age of Reason and pushes them to their logical conclusions. The confidence that begins to emerge in Bacon and Descartes becomes, in the eighteenth century, a broad cultural movement. Enlightenment thinkers ask whether reason can illuminate not only nature but also morality, religion, politics, economics, education, and society itself. If human beings can discover the laws governing the physical world, perhaps they can also discover the principles that should govern human life.

Yet the Enlightenment is not merely an age of confidence. It is also an age of criticism. Traditional institutions come under unprecedented scrutiny. Religious authority, political hierarchy,

inherited privilege, and established custom all face searching examination. Thinkers such as Locke, Voltaire, Rousseau, Berkeley, and Hume will explore both the possibilities and the limits of reason. Some will celebrate the promise of intellectual liberation. Others will uncover new forms of skepticism that threaten the very certainty modern philosophy sought to establish.

Part III began with a desire to recover knowledge and ended with a determination to reconstruct it. Part IV will ask whether that reconstruction can succeed. The dream of a rational civilization now stands before us in its most ambitious form. The achievements will be extraordinary. So, too, will the challenges that emerge from them.

The modern world is beginning to take shape. Its hopes, its confidence, and its doubts will define the next chapter of our journey.

Part IV: The Enlightenment and Its Critics

Preamble

There is a moment in the history of Western thought when confidence becomes the dominant intellectual mood — when the accumulated achievements of the preceding century seem to license not just new answers but a new way of asking questions altogether. That moment is the Enlightenment, and Part IV of this course plants the listener squarely inside it, surrounded by its exhilarations and its discontents in equal measure. The twelve lectures gathered here span one of the most consequential intellectual generations in Western history, stretching from the philosophical revolution of Locke and Newton through the skeptical mastery of Hume and the political economy of Adam Smith, to Rousseau's fierce and lonely dissent from nearly everything the age held dear. What emerges is not a simple story of progress but a conversation — argumentative, searching, sometimes self-undermining — about the nature of knowledge, the foundations of morality, the organization of society, and what, if anything, human reason is truly capable of.

The introductory lecture establishes the mood of the transitional generation of 1680 to 1715 with particular vividness. Europe in this period was not uniformly enlightened; Aristotelian scholasticism still ruled the universities, mysticism was resurging in certain quarters, and the last great wave of witchcraft persecutions had crested only decades before. But something had shifted. The reading public — larger, more secular, and more curious than any previous generation — had inherited the achievements of Galileo, Bacon, Descartes, and Newton, and was drawing from them a set of conclusions whose implications ran far beyond natural philosophy. The old model of

knowledge, based on the authority of inherited texts and the deductive logic of the disputation, was giving way to something new: induction from experience, confirmation by experiment, and a willingness to admit ignorance wherever experience ran out. Newton's demonstration that three laws of motion and a single formula for gravity could account for the architecture of the cosmos was not merely a scientific achievement. It was, for this generation, a cultural event — proof that the universe was lawful, knowable, and designed with an elegance that reflected, as many devoutly believed, the infinite wisdom of its creator. To study nature was to practice a kind of piety.

John Locke receives two full lectures here, one on his political thought and one on his epistemology, and that pairing is itself instructive. The same mind that produced the most influential theory of knowledge of the eighteenth century also produced the political philosophy that the American founders would reach for when they needed to justify revolution. Locke's epistemology is, at its heart, a doctrine of limits: all our ideas come from experience, and where experience runs out, honest inquiry must admit ignorance rather than reach for inherited metaphysics. His rejection of innate ideas clears the intellectual landscape of clutter with a thoroughness that would shape every major thinker who followed him. His politics are similarly disciplined: government exists to protect property and liberty under law, its authority rests on continuing consent, and despotism — arbitrary power unchecked by institutional restraint — is not merely inconvenient but illegitimate. That these two projects belong to the same person is not a coincidence. They share the same underlying commitment to experience as the ground of authority, and the same suspicion of any claim — philosophical, theological, or political — that places itself beyond accountability to human reason and human consequence.

Vico and Montesquieu represent a different but equally important current: the attempt to build a science of human society by taking history and culture seriously as objects of systematic study. Vico, the most underappreciated figure in this set of lectures, challenges the Cartesian assumption that mathematical clarity is the only model of knowledge, arguing instead that we can know history precisely because human beings made it. His cyclical account of civilization's rise and decline — moving through ages of gods, heroes, and men before collapsing back into barbarism and beginning again — anticipates Hegel, Marx, and the modern philosophy of history in ways that his contemporaries largely failed to recognize. Montesquieu, by contrast, received immediate and enormous recognition, and his insistence on the separation of powers as the structural remedy for despotism would shape the constitutions of the American and French revolutions alike. Both men share Locke's empiricism in spirit if not in method: they look at human affairs as they actually are, not as philosophers would prefer them to be.

Mandeville's notorious Fable of the Bees occupies its own peculiar place in the Enlightenment conversation. His paradox — that private vices produce public benefits, that the selfishness driving commercial society is precisely what makes it prosperous — outraged contemporaries and quietly transformed the intellectual landscape. By insisting on judging actions by their consequences rather than their intentions, Mandeville planted the seed of consequentialist moral philosophy that would eventually flower in Hume and Bentham. His frank secularism, his evolutionary account of how moral codes emerge from flattery and pride rather than reason or revelation, made him the Enlightenment's most scandalous witness to its own implications.

Bishop Berkeley stands as the most unexpected figure in this company: an idealist philosopher who turns the Enlightenment's own

empirical tools against its materialist conclusions, arguing that matter is an unnecessary and incoherent posit, and that the law-like regularity of our experience is best explained not by Newtonian mechanics but by the continuous creative activity of God. Berkeley's critique is genuinely formidable, and the fact that it is mounted from within the empiricist tradition rather than against it gives it a force that purely theological objections could not achieve.

Hume completes the empiricist tradition and simultaneously exposes its vertiginous depth. His epistemology demonstrates that our confidence in cause and effect, in the uniformity of nature, in the existence of the external world, all rest ultimately on custom and habit rather than rational proof. His moral theory replaces rational deliberation with sentiment, finding in utility and the calm passion of approbation the source of our ethical judgments. His assault on natural religion dismantles, argument by argument, the comfortable Newtonian faith that one could read God's goodness and wisdom directly from the order of the cosmos. After Hume, intellectual honesty demands a reckoning with uncertainty that much of the Enlightenment had preferred to avoid.

Adam Smith retrieves from Hume's moral theory a qualified optimism about commercial society: the invisible hand of market coordination can produce public benefits from private self-interest, though Smith is candid about the costs — the stunting of mind and body that the division of labor exacts from those who perform its most repetitive operations. Rousseau closes the part with a passionate counter-verdict: civilization itself is the disease, not the cure, and the general will, not the invisible hand, is the only political mechanism adequate to restoring what has been lost.

Together, these twelve lectures map an intellectual world at the peak of its confidence and the beginning of its self-doubt — a world that is still, unmistakably, ours.

Lecture 37: Introduction to the Enlightenment

Professor Alan Charles Kors

Introduction

We turn our attention now to an introduction to the Enlightenment, and in particular to the extraordinary generation in European thought: the generation of 1680 to 1715.

We have the advantage of hindsight, understanding what happens in the eighteenth century. It would not have been obvious at the time, looking at this generation, how revolutionary the changes were that were occurring within it. It was still very much a mixed intellectual world.

The Persistence of the Old Order

The persistence of tradition was dramatically strong. The Aristotelian scholastics still dominated the universities. The curriculum did not reflect the changes that had swept European knowledge in the seventeenth century.

Skepticism and fideism — the belief in the weakness of human reason and the necessity of faith — remained vital and powerful currents in Europe, but they were formally condemned in Catholic Europe and were about to be swept away throughout Europe by the new confidence in the natural philosophy of the seventeenth century.

There was also a resurgence of mysticism in Europe at the very end of the seventeenth century, a strong current of belief and practice, but one that was increasingly being identified as a dangerous enthusiasm or indeed as a superstition.

The New Philosophers

What marks the generation of 1680 to 1715 above all is the emergence of what the culture actually called "the new philosophers." It is they who were setting the terms of debate and increasingly winning the affections of the growing reading public.

That reading public perceived the new philosophy to have both theoretical strength — above all the new empirical philosophies embodied by Bacon and, as we shall see, Locke — and a concrete accomplishment in the Newtonian achievement and synthesis that demonstrated the power and the success of the new philosophy.

From Disputation to Induction: A Revolution in Persuasion

One way to think about the new philosophy as it was winning the reading public during this generation is to compare the way Europeans convinced one another — or believed they should convince one another — as the seventeenth century dawned, with how Europe was persuaded as the eighteenth century dawned.

The form of argument that dominated European universities throughout the seventeenth century, inherited from the medieval universities, was the *disputatio* — the disputation. How did one prove an argument? How did you convince someone that you were right and he was wrong? When did you know that you yourself, as a reasonable and rational person, ought to change your mind?

In the form of the disputation, what held primacy was authority — intellectual authority. Those texts that had stood the test of time, from which we could draw our axioms. Knowing what was true axiomatically, one proceeded logically in the manner of geometers

by deduction from premises known with certainty from the authority of inherited texts, and one deduced what followed from them.

The role of experience in the disputation was minor. We already know what is true from authority and logical deduction from authority. Knowing it to be true, we know there will be instances of it in the world, and so we offer some examples from experience of what we already know to be true. So if the issue is witchcraft, we have the authority of ancient texts establishing the truth about witchcraft; we make logical deductions from that; and we need some illustrations, and so we turn to various trials to show the reality and experience of witchcraft.

That whole model of persuasion was being overturned in this generation. There was a rejection of the presumptive authority of the past, an overturning of authority as the model of where to begin our inquiry into knowledge, and a growing recognition of the rights of natural reason even in the presence of human interpretations of theological authority.

If we are not going to draw our understanding of the world from authority, then deduction is no longer the model of reason we are going to use. Rather, what was perceived as having worked in the new science of the seventeenth century was to perceive inductively — from the logic of inference, moving from the particulars of nature to a set of generalizations from those principles. This means that what had been last in the sequence of the *disputatio* — experience — is now first in the model of knowledge of the new philosophy. The book we shall turn to is the book of nature. Knowledge from experience linked to experiment becomes the beginning of the search for truth: let experience and nature, inductively and logically understood, decide what we believe about the world in which we find ourselves.

The Genie Out of the Bottle

The overturning of the presumptive authority of the past lets the genie out of the bottle. It is not something that can be contained. Europe now understands that it is free to reject the past as a model. What had been true in astronomy and physics — the overturning of texts that had stood as authorities for centuries, indeed for millennia — was now understood to be true of all claims of knowledge in natural philosophy, which could be reexamined fresh and anew.

There is a growing sense in this generation that Europe in the seventeenth century had acquired something that would alter both knowledge and the human relationship to nature: proper method. A proper use of the human mind. And rightly or wrongly, this generation associated the awesome accomplishments of seventeenth-century natural philosophy — science — with education, with induction from nature, ordered by reason into laws of nature that were as general and as universal as possible, confirmed by experiment and by experience, and wherever possible put to the use of mankind and its betterment.

New Institutions and a New Reading Public

With the universities in general — with only a handful of exceptions — closed to the new philosophy, there was a shift in the location and the new centers of influence of intellectual change: a movement away from the universities and the religious orders to new scientific and intellectual academies being founded by kings, nobles, and aristocrats throughout Europe at this time. There was a new prominence given to learned journals attracting very wide readerships that discussed the accomplishments and the nature of the new philosophy. And indeed there were informal meeting places:

coffee houses and pubs all across Europe that became major centers of intellectual gathering and influence.

There was a growing secular reading public with a will to know, a hunger to read the new philosophy, and this public was reading the accomplishments and the minds of the seventeenth century with an extraordinary exhilaration. That audience also created a market for something quite remarkable in European intellectual life, and quite remarkable in its influence on the eighteenth century: the popularization of abstract and abstruse philosophy — the explanation for the ordinary reader of what had been accomplished in seventeenth-century science, philosophy, and political thinking.

The Emerging Heroes of the New Philosophy

The self-image of the new philosophers of this transitional generation is seen in their emerging heroes. What aspects of seventeenth-century authors had become those authors' legacy for the dawn of the eighteenth century?

This was a generation that passionately read Francis Bacon and saw him as teaching that one learns from nature, that one must avoid above all the idols of the theater — the inherited authority of ancient authors — that method is the essential task of philosophy, and that the proper method is induction: the path that, whether we move swiftly or slowly along it, leads us toward real knowledge of the world, and that that knowledge is a human power which, applied, can change our relationship to the world.

They read Descartes with enthusiasm, and they read him above all as proclaiming the rights of reason, the right of philosophy to begin in doubt, the right to be rationally persuaded of all things. They read Descartes with enthusiasm in his quest for order, clarity, and knowledge of the operations of the physical world, and were excited

by his sense that we can have a mechanical knowledge of the forces of nature.

They read Galileo with enthusiasm and saw him as a symbol of the absolute necessity of the freedom to philosophize — the freedom of natural philosophy. They accepted Galileo's instruction that we must look not in human books but in nature, God's book, for knowledge, and that the language of that book of nature is mathematics, and that we must quantify our understanding of nature and physical phenomena.

They read John Locke with great enthusiasm — to whom we will turn in the next two lectures — and they read Locke as a new philosopher in the Baconian tradition who believed that the boundary of our knowledge was our experience of the world, that we should admit ignorance on all matters beyond human experience, and that all knowledge was constructed from confirmable units of simple experience and that all claims of knowledge could be examined in such a light.

And they read with more than enthusiasm Isaac Newton, and saw in his accomplishment the power of the new model of natural knowledge. Three laws of motion and the law of universal gravitation, and both celestial and terrestrial physics — this generation believed — fell into place. Newton was for them the very model of inductive natural philosophy and the power of that model. They also drew from Newton a sense that they lived in a universe that was not only not beyond human understanding, but that was lawful and designed in ways that we might know. And from this they believed that one sees through nature and its laws, and through the wisdom of its order, to nature's God.

The Marks of the New Philosophy

In this generation, there was a sea change in the attitudes underlying intellectual life. One sees this in the marks of the new philosophy.

What could be more dramatic than the rejection of the presumptive authority of the past, and the extension of that rejection beyond issues of pure science to the whole enterprise of human knowledge? One sees it in the embrace of empiricism — learning from experience — and in the embrace of quantification: a nature reducible to mathematical law.

In the Aristotelian worldview, every particular entity acted from the nature of its own being and its own purposes, and one wanted an understanding based upon an almost infinite series of particular explanations. In the new model of knowledge, the more general and the more universal a law, the more powerful the explanation is deemed to be. Consider two simple laws stated mathematically — velocity equals time times acceleration; and there is a force, gravity, that varies directly in proportion to two masses and inversely to the square of the distances between them — which this generation believed made the universe comprehensible.

A Cultural and Religious Revolution

The new philosophy was also a cultural and religious revolution, not merely a philosophical one. Prosecution and persecution of witchcraft reached its high-water mark in European history not in the Middle Ages, not in the Reformation, but in the early to mid decades of the seventeenth century. Then, in one generation — the late seventeenth century — the assault upon witchcraft belief, part of a larger assault upon what was deemed superstition and claims of knowledge beyond experience, overturned the entire edifice of European witchcraft persecution and mania. The educated classes of

Europe imposed upon the rest of the culture an end to witchcraft denunciations, trials, and persecutions.

One sees this cultural revolution as well in the growing location of God's providence in natural laws, in the ordinary but now wondrous, ordered laws and operations of nature.

In some ways, for this generation, it had been as if there had always been in the center of town a complex clock, and every time the hand reached an hour, out would come Saint George and clang the exact number of hours against the side of a dragon. People thought: how miraculous, how astonishing. There must be an invisible agent that comes in — that coordinates, that brings Saint George out, that strikes — there must be all of these particular acts of a wise, invisible being intervening to keep things running right in the world, to give us the appearance of order.

But with the belief that one now understood the operation of natural law, the new model said: no, the wisdom lies in the design of the original clockmaker. That clock was created with mechanisms that coordinate by mechanistic action, reflecting the extraordinary intelligence and design of its creator.

It is very dramatic to relocate one's sense of religious awe from the particular to the general, from interventions in the natural order to the creation of the natural order itself. It produces what we can best think of as a new religious aesthetic, in which what seems most supreme and wise and infinitely intelligent and infinitely powerful about God is not particular providence — interventions in the world to bring about rain, to bring about climate, to bring about the body's healing — but the very general laws of providence that lead to survival, to the procreation of species, and to the maintenance of a relationship between human beings and nature in which crops grow and life might flourish.

The Problem of Miracle

Note, however, that this new religious aesthetic posed profound problems for the religious beliefs of Christian Europe — problems that would haunt and obsess the eighteenth century — for it raised the problem of miracle. If God's providence is to be located in the general laws of nature, if the wisdom is in the self-regulating design of the world, then an intervention would be like someone having to come and repair that clock in the town square. And if what one admired was the infinite wisdom of the original design, intervention poses a real problem for that admiration. The problem of miracle is there at the very heart of the dilemmas of the new philosophy.

The Ancients vs. the Moderns

In both England and France at the end of the seventeenth century and the dawn of the eighteenth, there were similar debates that rent the culture — debates about whether the ancients or the moderns were more to be admired. How extraordinary that this debate should be occurring at all in Europe. Yet more extraordinary was the conclusion ultimately reached in both cultures: that the past might well be superior in its art and its poetry — perhaps there would never again be so great an epic poet as Homer, or so great a tragedian as Sophocles — but that knowledge and science are cumulative. We know more about the world than the ancients. Our knowledge is superior. Our science is superior. And knowledge creates progress: the more we know about the real causes of things, the more we may change the world according to the human heart's desire for happiness.

The New Philosophy and Religious Orthodoxy

The new philosophy believed itself to be deeply religious, but it was involved in a very complex relationship with the religious orthodoxy around it, and it would generate a set of profound problems for European religious belief. It wanted to remove theology from areas that it deemed not properly within its sphere, and it desired profoundly to state and devise a theology consistent with — and evolving alongside — increases in natural knowledge.

These were revolutionary phenomena that would further secularize the West. The new philosophy's implications for the profoundest religious issues can scarcely be overstated. Europe believed it possessed a book — Revelation — that was from God. It believed that book to be true because it was supported by miraculous signs, by wonders, by things beyond the powers of nature. But the new philosophy asked minds to look in the book of nature and to admire not the miraculous but the order of the world.

The implications of the new philosophy for ethical thinking were equally dramatic. If what we admire about God's design is found in the laws of nature, and if it is a law of all living things — including human beings — that we seek happiness and flee pain (a commonplace observation in the West), then one might reach so revolutionary a conclusion as this: that it was self-evident from nature that the pursuit of happiness was ordained by God himself. That radical notion, embedded in the foundational documents of the American Revolution in a profoundly Protestant Christian America — the notion that God wills the pursuit of happiness, that happiness is the highest ethical notion in this world — is implicit in looking to the laws of nature to discover God's will.

And note that this is not a revolution from without, an invasion of European thought by foreign sources. These transformations are

occurring within Christian culture, which itself will produce the intellectual currents that make possible its own transformation and displacement from the center of European intellectual life.

The eighteenth century begins with intense theological and Christian commitments on the part of the literate and learned world. One of the things we will come to understand in the course of studying the eighteenth century is how anti-religious, and often specifically anti-Christian, attitudes and secularism arise as unintended consequences from that initial deep theological perspective.

Conclusion: The Birth of Modern Consciousness

By the end of the seventeenth century, we stand at nothing less than the birth of modern consciousness: scientific, secular, inquiring, committed to intellectual freedom, seeking a principle of intellectual authority apart from mere tradition and repetition — but tempted at times by skepticism and leaps of faith, critical and erudite, and certainly confused by the range of choices it has created for itself.

For better or for worse, we are the heirs of the seventeenth-century mind, living in its light and in its shadows. And those shadows would be described by many in the eighteenth century itself: a fear of materialism and naturalism, a loss of the sense of the wondrous and the divine and the miraculous in life, and the problem of progress — as we make ourselves more knowledgeable and more powerful, do we in fact make ourselves more moral and more happy? Those are the dilemmas bequeathed to us, with which Western thought will wrestle for the next three centuries.

Lecture 38: Locke — Politics

Professor Dennis G. Dalton

Introduction

Today we are discussing John Locke's politics. Locke was born in 1632, forty-four years after Thomas Hobbes. Like Hobbes, he was an English political philosopher writing in the seventeenth century. But unlike Hobbes, Locke's ideas greatly influenced the thought of the American Revolution, and particularly the ideas and the authors of the American Declaration of Independence — especially Thomas Jefferson.

The American Declaration of Independence reflects the ideas of John Locke by proclaiming that all men are created equal and are endowed with certain inalienable rights, among them life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Those sentiments derive from John Locke's *Second Treatise of Government*, which we will be looking at today.

We will be examining Locke's theories of power as it comes from the social contract, his ideas of property, and of freedom based upon the contract. But first, in order to place him more precisely within the tradition of Western political thought, let us look at the way in which Locke fits into the various schools of political theory as we know them, beginning with Plato.

Three Schools of Political Thought

We distinguish three schools of thought — three categories of ideas — beginning with Plato. Those three are idealism, realism, and reformism.

Plato sets forth, with political philosophy's full force, the concept of idealism. Idealism is a philosophy that, as we saw from examining Plato, looks on high for standards of justice and beauty, for ideas of the good. That gesture we saw in Raphael's superb painting *The School of Athens* — pointing to the heavens — captures this precisely, because from Plato's point of view it is there that we find our archetypal patterns, our ideal forms. Plato insists that the state is legitimized on the basis of our inquiry into those ideal standards, patterns, or archetypes. *The Republic* is an inquiry into how we understand those truths — those transcendent metaphysical truths that reside on high.

Plato's idealism is carried forth in political theory by many thinkers, most notably Jean-Jacques Rousseau. In the twentieth century we find it articulated by a variety of political theorists as well. It stands, however, most sharply at odds with the second school of thought: the realists.

When we treated Thomas Hobbes, we saw one of the key realists in political thought. Hobbes denies that these transcendental standards exist. He believes, on the contrary, that the laws of nature are to be determined by observing human phenomena. And recall that we examined Hobbes' thought in terms of his emphasis not on reason in the Platonic sense, but rather on the passions — the passions of desire for power and, above all, fear: fear of violent death. From Hobbes' point of view, there is no *finis ultimus* — no ultimate end or goal. There is no *summum bonum*, no ultimate good. There is a *summum malum*, Hobbes says, and that is the ultimate evil: the anxiety wrought within us by our fear of death.

The realists are at odds with the idealists on many counts, and yet they are at one with the idealists in a crucial respect. Hobbes is at one with Plato in his advocacy of a strong central government led by a powerful sovereign. Recall that Plato wanted power centralized in

the hands of a few, and Hobbes wholeheartedly concurs — he believes that power is to be centralized in the hands of the sovereign. The state, for both Plato and Hobbes, is a powerful entity, and there are to be no checks or balances on either the sovereign or Plato's guardians.

So the idealists and the realists, while at odds regarding the discovery of ultimate truth or a final form of happiness or a transcendental good, are at one in affirming two ideas: the centralized state and strong leadership.

Now, the interesting part is that the third school of thought — the reformists, which begins with Aristotle and includes the person we are examining today, John Locke — those reformists are at odds with both the realists and the idealists. They insist that the realists and the idealists have gone wrong in their theories of concentrated power and strong leadership. Locke's critique of Hobbes is precisely parallel to Aristotle's critique of Plato. From Locke's point of view, Hobbes is wrong in interpreting the degree of crisis that exists in England, and he is wrong in advocating a strong central state. Locke believes that a sovereign concentrating all power without any checks and balances is a false way of looking at politics.

The reformists are different from both the realists and the idealists in this respect: they look at their situation and say there is no great crisis here. Just as Aristotle diagnosed Greece, and as Locke diagnosed England, as certainly in need of government — and they desired rational government — they did not believe a powerful sovereign was needed, nor a centralized power in a strong state. They needed moderate reforms.

Just as Aristotle said: we need reforms, changes that will alter our situation, but we do not need tidal waves of transformation, revolutionary change that will sweep aside all corruption — because

the corruption is not really there. What the reformists find instead, according to both Aristotle and Locke, are vital institutions that should not be swept away. Recall the institutions that Aristotle emphasized: the family, private property, and certainly codes of morality, trust, and love. Those institutions, according to the reformists, are to be preserved.

Recall how Plato swept aside the institution of private property in his second wave, along with the family. Just as Aristotle was horrified by that, so too is Locke horrified. Hobbes, as we saw, also threatened the sacred nature of private property in England — he said it was up to the sovereign to decide which property was public and which was private. Locke is as horrified at this as Aristotle was at Plato's revolutionary reforms. Locke insists that private property is sacred, an institution that must be preserved. When he looks at Hobbes' sweeping changes made in the name of a sovereign, he says: Hobbes, you have set us off down the path to despotism.

It is the reformist challenge, then, that we want to examine — not this time in the context of Aristotle, but in the context of Hobbes.

Locke and Hobbes: Contrasting Prescriptions

Locke and Hobbes offer quite different prescriptions for the human condition. And isn't it fascinating that even though Locke and Hobbes are both Englishmen writing in the same century, they are more different from one another than Locke is from Aristotle, separated as he is from Aristotle by 2,400 years and by a thought and a culture that should be so radically different?

From Locke's point of view, Aristotle had it just right in his critique of Plato: Plato goes to extremes, and in advocating revolution, he is wrong. From Locke's point of view, Hobbes too goes to extremes — he wants to set up an all-powerful central state. Locke speaks, then,

not of the value of a sovereign's leadership, but rather of institutions, of laws, of political culture, and perhaps above all the sacred nature of property, with freedom under law as the means to preserve it.

Locke is vital because he asks us to look not to grand ideas of the good on high, as Plato does, but to political culture, to existing institutions, and to the way in which extremism must be discouraged at all costs in the name of moderation. With Aristotle, Locke looks to the means.

Power

Locke's major themes, as I mentioned a few moments ago, are those of power, of the state of nature, of the social contract, of property, and of freedom — especially freedom under law. Let us look at these ideas and see how they hang together in Locke's systematic approach to politics.

Locke views power as the right to make laws for regulating and preserving property. This is precisely what he says in his *Second Treatise of Government*: "Political power, then, I take to be a right of making laws with penalties of death, and consequently all less penalties, for the regulating and preserving of property, and of employing the force of the community in the execution of such laws, and in the defence of the commonwealth from foreign injury, and all this only for the public good."

Locke distinguishes — certainly with Hobbes in mind — between two forms of power. The first is the kind he has just set forth: power exercised to preserve property, to maintain freedom under the law. But there is another kind of power which he derides and denounces, surely with Hobbes in mind: the power of the despot, the power that subjects people to arbitrary will. That kind of power, from Locke's

point of view, is lethal. As he looks at Hobbes, he sees someone who characterizes power precisely in this illegitimate form.

These two forms of power — the right kind, the legitimate kind, which is limited under a moderate government, as opposed to the wrong kind, the despotic and arbitrary power that Hobbes sets forth, unchecked and extreme — form the central contrast of Locke's political theory.

The State of Nature

If Locke and Hobbes differ drastically on the interpretation of power, so also do they differ on the state of nature. You will recall that the state of nature is not, in either Hobbes or Locke, merely a vision of some remote and distant moment in the past. It is rather the condition of humankind — it represents the intrinsic human impulses that we all carry, present with us at every moment of our lives. When we speak of the state of nature, we do speak of a vision of how the human condition actually existed, but also of how it continues to exist in terms of its inherent qualities and innate disposition.

Recall that in Hobbes' state of nature, existence was an egregious, wolf-like condition of every man at war with every man — captured in those famous purple passages where Hobbes says in the *Leviathan* that the life of man in the state of nature is solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short. We must get out of that state of nature and into something that involves the sovereign and the Leviathan — a safe state — because Hobbes, as a realist, is advocating security above all. Not the virtue that Plato set forth, not the moderation that Aristotle and Locke advocate, but ultimate security: the peace, the tranquility, the serenity he desires so desperately. This is what the realist wants.

But Locke, the reformist, wants moderate government and measured treatment under law. The state of nature he sets forth is not at all like

the one Hobbes expounds. Locke's state of nature is a very civilized condition — a society in which there is equality and freedom, a good deal of mutual affection, even the bonds of love. If Hobbes' state of nature reminds us of a wolf-like existence in which people are tearing at each other's throats, Locke's state of nature suggests a gathering of British gentlemen deciding on cricket and tea. This contrast in visions of the state of nature is absolutely vital to understanding both thinkers.

When Locke describes the state of nature, he is diagnosing no crisis, but rather a civilized and urbane society — one that does not require drastic and radical treatment. It requires government, surely, but not the kind of government Hobbes set forth. The kind of government appropriate to Locke's state of nature administers in moderation. We sometimes call that kind of government a "night watchman" government: government acts as a sort of security guard. So far from the omnipotent sovereign Hobbes envisions, the night watchman Locke describes remedies what Locke calls the "inconveniences" in the state of nature. No state of nature is perfect — there will be passion, ill will, and anger, he says, and these will cause inconveniences. Therefore, government is necessary, but a government of modest scope.

The Social Contract

The kind of government Locke wants must be a government under contract. Recall what Hobbes' contract looked like: it was an agreement formed by people out of sheer desperation, driven by fear, because they were unable to keep the peace. According to Hobbes, the contract ensures that peace by delegating authority to an omnipotent sovereign. That sovereign takes all of the rights of his subjects, and on the basis of that contract, the sovereign holds

sweeping power with no checks and balances — executive power, legislative power, judicial power, the power to appoint his own successor, all wrapped into one, including, as we said, the power to censor religion and to decide what is public and what is private property. The contract, from Hobbes' point of view, authorizes the sovereign to act in this sweeping manner because the situation is desperate and radical surgery is necessary.

Since, from Locke's point of view, the situation is not desperate at all but rather admits of moderate treatment, the remedy is rational and limited. The social contract for Locke is a compact among free and equal men to move beyond the state of nature by forming a limited polity with limited government. In this way he differs profoundly from Hobbes' attempt to create an all-powerful sovereign.

Locke holds that in forming this contract, one must consent to become subject to another's power — but that power is limited, and its source is not one man, not a sovereign, but the parliament. That is, the majority has the right to rule the minority.

We must note, however, that the majority Locke envisions is not really the majority of the entire state, because it excludes women. Locke is a seventeenth-century theorist, and in that century — as even after — women were normally excluded, as they had been by Aristotle, from the ownership of property and from the exercise of any political or social rights. Locke, like Aristotle, believed that women were destined to be in the home, to be faithful spouses and productive mothers. The majority Locke refers to, then, is of propertied males in the society — not the whole society, but only those who have education, property, and the right sex, as Aristotle had stipulated.

It is Locke, not Hobbes, who in this way marks the beginning of modern democratic political theory, which emphasizes the rights of

the majority — albeit a majority that is, in his conception, limited.

Property

Locke's theories of property differ radically from those of Hobbes. His idea of property begins with a notion that Hobbes did not hold, which we call the labor theory of value: property is valued in proportion to the amount of labor invested in it.

Locke believed this fervently. If human beings consent to owning property, they also consent to investing labor in it, and there will be unequal amounts of labor invested. Accordingly, Locke believed that God had given to us unequal possession of property, according to the industrious, the energetic, the more rational — those willing to work for what they have. Locke stresses legal equality, but he does not stress equality of material possessions. Class inequality is protected in Locke's scheme, and he roots it in the nature of human nature: people are not equal in all respects, and they are unequal in the amount of effort, energy, and work they will give to accumulating wealth.

Locke sees no problem whatsoever in the accumulation of wealth. He thinks it natural and good that individuals in a society accumulate unequal amounts of wealth, and therefore he is no prophet of socialism, but rather a defender of class inequality. That strain has continued to influence our thinking about politics even today: although equality is given lip service in many democracies, it is not achieved.

Liberty

Perhaps the idea Locke has contributed to the United States more than any other is the concept of liberty. Let us look at the way in

which Locke frames that idea and how it becomes so important in influencing our founding fathers.

When he speaks of liberty, he is talking about liberty but not license. He says in his *Second Treatise of Government*:

"*Freedom is not a liberty for everyone to do what he likes, to live as he pleases, and not to be tied by any laws. But freedom of men under government is to have a standing rule to live by, common to every one of that society, and made by the legislative power erected in it — not to be subject to the inconstant, uncertain, unknown, arbitrary will of another man.*"

Locke thus believes that if the legislature is the foundation of authority — if we look to the legislature for limited and not absolute power — then we will not be found wanting. We can trust the legislative branch as we cannot trust a monarchical or arbitrary absolute power.

He continues: "Freedom from absolute arbitrary power is so necessary to, and so closely joined with, a man's preservation that he cannot part with it but by what forfeits his preservation and life together. For a man, not having the power of his own life, cannot by compact or his own consent enslave himself to anyone, nor put himself under the absolute arbitrary power of another to take away his life when he pleases." He is refuting Hobbes here. What he is saying is that no contract can legitimately place a person under the arbitrary absolute will of another.

It is, from Locke's point of view, a sacred duty of the people under the contract to maintain the legitimacy and sacred nature of freedom. "The end of law," he says, "is not to abolish or restrain, but to preserve and enlarge freedom. Where there is no law, there can be no freedom. For liberty is to be free from restraint and violence from others, which cannot be where there is no law — and therein

not to be subject to the arbitrary will of another, but freely to follow his own."

The Legislative Power

In this quest for freedom under law — the legacy we have inherited from Locke's liberalism — the legislative branch is critical. When he speaks of the need for legislative power, he says: "The great end of men's entering into society, being the enjoyment of their properties, must depend upon the legislative power. The legislative is then not only the supreme power of the Commonwealth, but it is sacred and unalterable."

When he speaks of the way in which the legislature must apply the same rules to all citizens, both rich and poor, he is speaking of the fairness and justice that must exist in a polity. Its laws must promote the public good. And perhaps most important for Locke: it must not seize property via taxation without the people's direct and continuing consent — no increase in taxes without the explicit consent of the people.

Legitimate political power, therefore, is exercised only for the common benefit, and it requires the continuing consent of the governed. It becomes illegitimate when it is exercised arbitrarily. Absolute power can and must be resisted. Over and again Locke says that despots — even kings — when they lose the trust of their people, must be disobeyed.

Conclusion: Locke's Legacy

Think of what the founding fathers felt when they read and reflected upon those critical ideas of Locke: liberty under law, that tyranny must be resisted, that despotism is at heart a false form of

government, that arbitrary and absolute rule over any man is corrupt. From Jefferson's point of view, from Franklin's and Adams' point of view, from the perspectives of all of our founding fathers, Locke managed to set forth a ringing call to resistance and, above all, the maxim: liberty — but liberty under law.

Lecture 39: Locke — The Revolution in Knowledge

Professor Alan Charles Kors

Introduction

We turn now to John Locke and the revolution in knowledge. Although John Locke's epistemology — his theory of knowledge — is generally not highly thought of by twentieth-century philosophers, who find that he approaches certain questions too casually, his role in intellectual history, in the actual history of lived human thought in our culture, is almost incalculable in its importance. The epistemology of John Locke triumphs in the West. For one hundred years it will be John Locke whose epistemological authority and influence shapes the way that Europeans think about knowledge, its nature, and its acquisition.

Think about the crucial importance of having epistemological authority. The way one thinks about the nature of knowledge, the standards of knowledge, and the acquisition of knowledge sets the foundation and framework of one's thinking about all areas of human thought and inquiry. And it will be John Locke who sets that foundation for the eighteenth century.

Locke and Descartes: Empiricism and Rationalism Reconsidered

In the textbooks, John Locke is often used in sharp contrast to René Descartes, in an attempt to draw a distinction between Descartes' rationalism on the one hand and Locke's empiricism on the other. This distinction has generally been overdrawn.

For example, while Descartes founds his philosophy by purely rational means — rationalism independent of empirical inquiry — he reaches a point where one must become an empiricist and study the physical and physiological world, looking scientifically and empirically for the mechanisms of the natural order. There is much that is empirical in Cartesian philosophy. Similarly, when Locke thinks about what makes something true and certain, he is a rationalist. Certainty does not apply to many kinds of propositions for Locke, but it does apply to propositions of relationship. Thus, for John Locke, we know that three is more than two, that black is not white, that a circle is not a triangle — not by our study of nature, but by what he calls a "bright sunshine of the mind." Those propositions are self-evident the moment the mind looks at them. So when Locke thinks about certainty, his criterion is rationalist.

What, then, are the real debates between Descartes and Locke that give rise to that formula of Locke the empiricist against Cartesian rationalism? Their real debates concern two issues above all. The first is the goal of fundamental natural philosophy, and the second is the issue of the source of ideas and what follows from identifying that source.

For Descartes, the goal of fundamental natural philosophy is truth about the real qualities of the world — knowing what the world really is as being. For John Locke, that knowledge is not obtainable. The goal of fundamental natural philosophy is, rather, ordered probable knowledge about our experience of the world: making sense of our experience of phenomena.

For Descartes, the source of our ideas is innate. We have, before experience, an idea of self, of soul, of matter, of God, of the fundamental nature of being in the world. For John Locke, all of our ideas are acquired by experience. So for Locke, if the issue is where we find certain rational truth, his criterion is intuitive certainty, much

in the manner of Descartes. But the real goal of knowledge is knowledge of our experience of the world, and that is known only through acquired ideas.

Sensation and Reflection: The Two Sources of Ideas

For John Locke, natural philosophy is centered upon our experience of the world, and all of our ideas are acquired from two kinds of experience. The first is sensation: the ideas imprinted upon our mind, acquired by our mind from our senses and from the senses' experience of the world. The second is what Locke terms reflection: the mind's experience of its own operations as it deals with sensation.

To understand reflection by way of example: it is through sensation that I get an idea of trees. My mind then compares those trees and makes a judgment about which is taller. I now have not only the experience of trees but the experience of comparing and the experience of judging. Those are the only two sources of our ideas — sensation and reflection — and simple sensations or reflections combine to form complex ideas.

The best model for understanding what Locke means by complex ideas is drawn from atomism, the classical philosophy we have already discussed in this series. In the seventeenth century, a French philosopher by the name of Pierre Gassendi sought to revive classical atomism, the philosophy of Epicurus, and Locke read him with great interest in the physics of atomism. In the atomist model, the complex beings of the world are formed by the combinations of simple atoms — different atoms coming together to create what we would now think of as a molecule, formed from simple components. This is Locke's model for the creation of complex ideas. The mind takes simple sensations and simple reflections and combines them into

complex ideas, so that from sensation, willing, and body, we arrive at our idea of a human being and then of a society. The mind combines simple ideas into complex ones.

What Locke is certain of, however, is that there are no innate ideas, and thus all of our knowledge is limited to our experience of the world. There is no knowledge beyond human experience, because all ideas, and hence all knowledge, are acquired only by our experience of the world.

The Limits of Human Knowledge: Nominal Versus Real Essence

What follows from this is that we can have no knowledge of what underlies experience. It is not that there is nothing underlying experience — it is that we obviously cannot know what that is, because as our minds work, we are limited in our knowledge to what we experience.

Here is where the contrast between Locke and Descartes becomes most influential and indeed dramatic. If we can have no knowledge of what underlies experience, it means we can have no rational knowledge of what mind is — we only know our experience of the behavior of mind. We can have no knowledge of what matter is — we can only have experience of the behavior of matter. What Locke is saying is nothing less than that ontology — the science of being, the philosophy of being, the inquiry into the real nature of the world — is beyond the powers of the human mind.

Locke argues that what we do in our experience and knowledge of mind and matter is this: we take what seems to us the most striking aspect of that experience — that mind thinks, that matter is extended in length, width, breadth, and space, that matter is

ultimately impenetrable — and we give the name of what matter is, and the name of what mind is, to those qualities. But when we say that mind is thought and matter is extension, we have no ontological knowledge there. We are, in effect, sticking a flag in a dramatic part of our experience of mind and matter and saying: I will identify mind this way, I will identify matter that way.

In short, he argues — to use his own terms — we know the nominal essence of matter, what we name it, but not the real essence of matter, what it actually is in its being. We know the nominal, not the real essence of mind.

For Locke, this admission of ontological incapacity is proper humility. God could have created us capable of knowing anything that he chose us to know. He created us — as we discover by the study of our own minds — not capable of knowing the real essence of things, and limited to knowledge of experience. It is proper humility to recognize the limitations of human nature, human thought, and human knowledge.

On Cartesian Dualism and the Limits of Claims About Mind

On the issue of Cartesian dualism — the relationship of matter and thought — there is much evidence in Locke's writings that he leans informally toward dualism, toward the view that we are made of two seemingly incompatible entities, matter and mind. But we have absolutely no knowledge of that dualism. And if anyone should accuse him of irreligion for saying that we do not know with certainty that we have a soul distinct from a material body, Locke turns the question of irreligiosity back upon his critics.

He is saying that for a human being to argue that we know with certainty that we must be made of two distinct beings is for a human being to claim that God himself, in his omnipotence, is incapable of creating matter capable of thought. It is to claim that God would have lacked the power, had he so chosen, to create matter capable of thought. That is the true arrogance — an ontological claim that would bind God. Humility is understanding the limitations of human knowledge, and we need to admit ignorance as the proper response to questions that go beyond human experience of the world. When those questions are posed, the honest answer is: I don't know. We cannot answer that question. It is beyond human knowledge.

And Locke believes — and the eighteenth century will believe — that Western philosophy needs to admit ignorance far, far more than it ever had done. We need to abate the claims of philosophy.

The Lockean agenda, then, is not to speculate fruitlessly on what mind is, but to learn in and from experience how mind behaves. The question is not to speculate endlessly on what matter is — about which philosophers never could agree because they have no knowledge on which to base agreement or disagreement — but to learn from and in experience how the world of physical objects behaves. And since such knowledge is not based on logic but on experience, it is always open to correction by further experience.

Think of someone from the tropics who hears the claim that water can become so hard that someone can walk across a river or a lake. The person says: that has never occurred in my experience — that is true. But if the person should then infer from that, therefore it cannot happen, what will occur the first time the person encounters ice, a frozen lake, a frozen pond in a different climate? The person must modify his views about water and about what is and is not possible based upon experience. And we are always in that situation — always, in theory, the person from the tropics who has never

experienced water in that frozen state. Knowledge is therefore always open to emendation, to correction based upon new experience.

The Lockean Model: Key Features

Locke's epistemology will become the dominant theory of knowledge of the eighteenth century, effecting a vast revolution in the culture's sense of the nature and limits of natural knowing. The essential qualities of this Lockean model may be described as follows.

The mind is, in his phrase, a *tabula rasa* — a blank slate — on which nature imprints ideas via sensations, and in which the mind becomes aware of its own operations and powers as it deals with sensations via reflection. While in Lockean philosophy some ideas seem naturally to attract each other by association, the mind in the creation of knowledge is above all else active. By abstraction and combination it forms complex ideas. And finally, propositions about the world, since they are based upon experience, may only be probable; their probability depends upon their relationship to prior experience and they are always subject to change by future experience.

The influence of this model is an immensely vital cultural force in the eighteenth century. It leads to a demand for analysis, for clarity, for confirmation of claims. In theory, any proposition — the most complex, the most abstract — any claim about the nature of things may be analyzed into its component ideas and then into its component experiences, and may be judged in relationship to our actual experience of the world. The world of real knowledge becomes, by analysis and by experimental confirmation, a lucid world, an accessible and unmystifying world, devoid of obscurity. People make claims and you have the right to say: how do you know

that? Based upon what experiences? Based upon what tests? Take what is complex, analyze it into its simple parts and claims, and confirm or disconfirm propositions about the world by comparing them to the actual behavior of the things described. That becomes, in many ways, the mission of the eighteenth century.

Roots and Implications of Locke's Model

Locke is not writing something wholly new under the sun, and one should understand something of the roots and the implications of his model.

His distinction between nominal and real essence harks back to the deepest medieval debates between nominalism and realism concerning the state of possible human ontological knowledge. Locke is the great nominalist of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. His sense of the method of knowledge based upon induction is deeply linked to Francis Bacon and to Bacon's whole model of inquiry in the *Novum Organum*. His sense of names — that we give names to the objects of our experience, planting these flags of naming to keep our memory of parts of experience alive — is a theory of language with roots in the work of Thomas Hobbes. Locke has read, is aware of, and often acknowledges many of these debates.

The implications of Locke perplex many in the eighteenth century. A significant number of thinkers try to mechanize Locke's model of mind — to make it consistent with the growing mechanism of early modern thought. Thus one French Lockean, Claude Adrien Helvétius, an influential French philosopher of the second half of the eighteenth century, believing that he is faithfully teaching Lockean philosophy, will argue that to sense, to have a sensation, is already to

judge — because there is an automatic process that leads us from our sensory experience of the world to our knowledge of the world.

But as Helvétius' great critic Rousseau will see very clearly, this distorts Locke utterly, because Locke has insisted as a central aspect of his philosophy that the human mind is active — an active agency that wills, that chooses, that compares, that judges. These different readings of Locke will lead to great debates about the implications of his thought for materialism, for mechanism, and for whether we can have a physiology of thought.

Ethics, Environment, and Character

A second implication of Locke that will obsess many eighteenth-century thinkers is that we learn ethical ideas by experience as well, implying that our ethical notions are wholly relative to our experience. As Locke analyzes the acquisition of ethical ideas, he argues that we call good those things that cause, or that we believe will cause, our well-being, and we call evil those things that cause, or that we believe will cause, pain.

This model sounds terribly subversive of any sense of absolute ethics, and indeed sounds very close to Thomas Hobbes' model of ethical thinking. What saves Locke, in the minds of the culture, from being categorized with Hobbes as an ethical relativist who sees nothing beyond pain and pleasure as the source of good and evil, is that in Locke the model is providential. Human nature is created by God and adapted to our real needs by God, such that God has providentially joined the good to the real causes of human well-being and happiness, and has joined evil to the real causes of human suffering and pain. When we study societies, or indeed our own lives, we discover that the things that yield real happiness are such things as

friendship, family, neighborliness, membership in a good society, and living at peace with our fellow creatures.

The system is providential, but its implications are dramatic nonetheless: all we mean by good are those things that we associate with our well-being. If our knowledge of ethics and the world is determined by our particular experience, then it would seem that environment determines all. Change the environment — change what causes pain and pleasure, reward and punishment in a society — and you change the very thinking and ethical nature of the individuals within it. The implications seem dramatic in terms of relativism: what we think, what we believe, what we value is relative to the time, place, and circumstance of our experience.

The implication is also dramatic for our understanding of character. Character is not something, as the West so long had thought, fixed and essential — but something developed by experience. If one looks at medieval and Renaissance drama, one finds the clash of fixed essential types: saint and sinner, hero and coward. If one looks at Western drama and the Western novel from the influence of Locke onward, what do we see? We see the development of character — what in someone's life led to what someone becomes.

Philosophical Idealism and Religious Belief

Locke also bequeaths a troubling specter to the future of eighteenth-century and indeed all further Western philosophy: the specter of what is called philosophical idealism. If all we really know are our ideas of the world, how do we know whether there is anything real out there that corresponds to them, that resembles them? All we seem to know are internal impressions and ideas.

And finally, Locke raises the dramatic question in his epistemology of how we are to base religious belief upon empirical knowledge. In his

own work of Christian apologetics, *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, he recognizes that we need empirical evidence of Christian truth, and he points to the miracles of Christ and the fulfillment of prophecy — validated by sound testimony — as evidence that such revelation could only have come from God. That places the issue of the empirical foundations of Christianity at the center of the debates of the eighteenth century.

Lecture 40: Vico and the New Science of History

Professor Darren Staloff

Introduction

In this lecture, we examine the philosophy of Giovanni Battista Vico — in particular his *New Science*, a new science of history, which in many ways was the founding document, the founding work, in the modern philosophy of history. But it was also a profoundly important critique of critical philosophy itself. Now, Vico was, in his own lifetime, a fairly obscure figure, a professor of rhetoric at Naples. But his philosophy of history had an immense influence in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. And in many ways we will see that Vico's *New Science* occupies an extremely curious place in the normal trajectory of eighteenth-century intellectual history.

The early Enlightenment was characterized by a commitment to a naturalistic metaphysic. Such a metaphysic looked to science as the means to all rational and reliable knowledge, and the hero figure of this movement was obviously Sir Isaac Newton, heralded as having successfully discovered at least some of the principal laws of nature. Following that breakthrough, the next task was obviously to apply the same scientific method to understanding man, society, politics, and history. This was attempted in a variety of different ways — often by a study of the laws of human nature or psychology, as we see in Spinoza and to some extent in Hobbes; sometimes formulated through social contractarianism, again in Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau; and in some cases by a study of the laws of historical causation, first raised in certain ways by Machiavelli and then developed to some extent by Montesquieu.

Vico, however, combined both of these approaches — the psychological insight as well as the historical one — and what he offered was, in fact, an evolutionary interpretation of human history, one not based on direct nomothesis but rather on the sort of development associated in the nineteenth century with Hegel and later, in the natural world, with Darwin. So on the one hand, Vico's analysis of history really does fulfill the Enlightenment's project of a science of man — a science based on an empirical study of psychology, society, politics, and culture. But on the other hand, Vico's science was obviously intended not as a celebration of Enlightenment naturalism but rather as a warning against its central tendencies, and it thus turned Enlightenment criticism against itself. In that way, one might argue that Vico is in fact a modern anti-modern.

While he was obscure in his own lifetime, his work was rediscovered in the nineteenth century, where he was widely heralded as a precursor to Hegel and other influential philosophers of history, and he has remained an important figure all the way into the twentieth century. Figures like Isaiah Berlin have drawn great inspiration from Vico's work. And those who have read James Joyce — in particular *Finnegans Wake* — will recognize it as a massive and extended fictional representation of Vico's theory of *corso* and *ricorso*, the course and recourse of history and institutions.

Vico's Epistemological Challenge to Descartes

I want you to keep in mind, as we examine Vico, that he is in this way something of a ridge-rider — deploying the techniques of the Enlightenment against its central metaphysical, moral, and epistemological positions. And it is with epistemology that I want to begin.

After Descartes — and in many ways Vico is responding more than to anyone else to Descartes — the epistemological status of history had been placed in jeopardy. We recall that Descartes' epistemology was based on that of clear and distinct ideas. Such an epistemology precluded any possibility of a scientific history, because history is not axiomatic and not like geometry. Historical terms cannot be rigorously defined, nor can history be subjected to experiment. So if you take the Cartesian model of science, history becomes something about which we cannot have reliable or certain knowledge.

Vico responded to this criticism — in particular to the principle of *cogito ergo sum*, which supported this epistemological doctrine of clear and distinct ideas, a doctrine of certainty based on intuitive and unreflective clarity and distinction. And it was the fact that it was intuitive and unreflective that allowed Vico to argue that such arguments were in fact sub-scientific.

Clarity and distinction, he argues, apply to mathematics as a criterion of truth for precisely one reason: mathematical ideas are our own conceptual inventions. So he argues for a counter-principle, which he calls *verum factum* — we know what we make. We know the truth about matters that we have cognitively constructed or invented. It is for that reason that we are able to have the kind of knowledge and certainty in mathematics that we do, and why we can only obtain a practical certainty in scientific matters — because we did not create nature.

But in this case we find that history, therefore, is something that should be subject to that sort of certain scientific knowledge, precisely because history is made by man, at least in part. History can accordingly be a science. And it is that new science which we will examine in the rest of this lecture.

The Course of History: Three Ages

We begin with what Vico calls the course of history. Roughly speaking, Vico held to a cyclical theory of history. It is worth noting at the outset that Vico's cyclical theory applies only to post-Diluvian Gentile nations — that is to say, Vico was ultimately a fairly orthodox and pious Catholic, which is one of the reasons he rejects Enlightenment naturalism. His philosophy of history therefore does not apply to the ancient Hebrews, who had direct contact with God, and whose history is defined by direct divine intervention rather than by the kind of law-like development that Vico will argue is also ultimately the work of God — but God working through secondary causes in his providential design.

This cyclical theory holds that nations, cultures, and civilizations pass through certain definable stages. There is, however, no eternal return in Vico's doctrine. Ancient Romans and most non-Judeo-Christian peoples had also believed in cyclical theories of history, and they had often argued for eternal return — that everything simply repeats itself. Vico, by contrast, thought that there is in fact development toward truth between cycles.

Vico argues that nations undergo a common course of development consisting of exactly three stages, each of which represents a distinct level not only of political and social organization, but also of cultural activity — and more than anything, of consciousness. The mind of man changes; the way he thinks and understands his universe changes in different epochs. The mentality and institutions that typify a particular stage of development will be preserved among the new institutions and mentalities that develop in the later stages. And the mechanism that moves cultures through these stages turns out ultimately to be class struggle, which is why Vico is an important precursor to Marx.

Each stage is increasingly popular and humanistic. When the cycle has run its course, the civilization in question undergoes dissolution — either conquered from without or collapsing from within — and the whole process begins again. This is what Vico calls the *ricorso*, the recourse of institutions.

The primary focus of Vico's study is, to a lesser extent, Hellenic classical Greece, and primarily the history of ancient Rome. In part this reflects the wealth of sources available to him on Rome, but it is also due, I think, to Rome's affiliation with modern Europe. Rome was the founding parent state of modern Western European culture, and the Roman example was a great inspiration for people in the eighteenth century. Vico holds that Roman history is typical — not in the sense that every nation is exactly like Rome, but that Rome is an archetype, and that in the right conditions every nation would follow the trajectory of Rome in its course of development, absent outside influences.

This means that Vico will employ new methods of analysis: methods coming from philology — which will be an important source subsequently for Nietzsche — including the study of languages, as well as a kind of empathetic understanding of ancient cultures based on archaeological and literary sources, which very much inform our contemporary practice of anthropology.

The Age of Gods

The first of these ages of development Vico calls the Age of Gods. Here he is responding, I think, quite powerfully to the social contractarianism found in Hobbes and Locke, where they had argued that man in his natural state is the same rational creature we find in his socialized state — simply alienated and isolated, and therefore forming contracts to create government and society. Vico argues, I

think much more realistically, that natural man is indeed primitive, and that primitive man is by nature beastly: his consciousness is likely to be extremely limited and his rationality highly impaired.

The first breakthrough to history, according to Vico, is the establishment of the family state. In the most primitive state, post-Diluvian Gentiles simply acted like animals, procreating wildly and leaving their offspring to fend for themselves after reaching a fairly young age. What creates the first family state is that such people are filled with superstition and fear and assume that natural forces are informed by divine agencies. Thus, when in the fields mating with their women, they hear thunder and lightning and associate that with the divine anger of the gods — and this produces in them a sense of shame and fear. They suspect that the gods disapprove of their promiscuity. They therefore take particular women to their caves for shelter, and we find the emergence of the first sanctified marriages — the first basic institution of society and of historical development.

As mentioned, these men believe in a primitive anthropomorphic interpretation of the gods, one associated with natural forces expressing divine anger. So the first gods are, for Vico, storm gods — like Jove or Zeus, Marduk in Babylon, Indra in the subcontinent of Asia. We could multiply examples of these thunder gods indefinitely. The thunderbolt for these ancient peoples is a message and a command. This suggests that the principal form of wisdom among these first men in the Age of Gods is augury: the reading of signs in nature and, of course, in animals. The Romans, of course, were quite famous for the practice of augury — reading the fate of battles in the disposition of the internal organs dissected from a bird.

In such an organization, the ancient family in the Age of Gods is intensely patriarchal. The father is the king, the judge, and the priest of these first proto-societies, possessing absolute power and dominion over all members of the family. Three principles support

this stage. The first is religion — the belief in divine agency. The second is marriage — marriages sanctified and approved by the gods. And the third is the burial of the dead, because it is burial that first creates private property: once one buries one's dead, one marks that area as sacred ground, as ground occupiable only by that particular family.

It is important to note that this Age of Gods is no golden age. The mentality of man is crude. What little order exists within the family is the result of frightful religion and remarkably cruel and harsh severity. The mentality of this epoch is crudely physical, with little in the way of rationality or imagination; it is based on sense. Signs are seen in nature — nature is literally telling us a story, the heavens and all things serving as divine auspices showing us the will of the gods. And the obedience enforced by the patriarch in the family state is important because it prepares people to live in an orderly fashion, giving them the sort of psychological predisposition that allows for the eventual emergence of the city-state.

The Age of Heroes

The next age of man Vico calls the Age of Heroes. Not all men found themselves in caves in primitive family states. Some post-Diluvian Gentiles continued to wander aimlessly, practicing their bestial life, procreating promiscuously, and attacking all their fellows without distinction. They therefore fall into two groups: the hunted and the hunters. The hunted — the weaker ones — seek refuge from their more violent fellows in the clearings or asylums of the patriarchs, those fields established around the buried ancestors of those families. These patriarchs organize themselves into a coalition to drive off the other class of primitives, the violent marauders. The refugees now become the clients or *famuli* of the patriarchs — and

here we see the beginning of subordination between what were once primitives who have now become serfs.

These clearings, these asylums, become the first villages, where the patriarch is still the king, father, and priest of his family, tribe, or clan, and the refugees are put to work on the land owned exclusively by the patriarchs. It is important to note that the refugees not only have no property rights; they are also not allowed sanctified marriages, precisely because they do not share the religion of the fathers and the patriarchs, who therefore do not recognize their marriages as sacred. They are consequently regarded as illegitimate. They are unable to have *patrimony* — legitimate lines of descent within their families — and therefore cannot transmit property to their offspring.

After the land is settled, Vico argues, the refugees, the serfs, rebel. They are ultimately pacified by an agrarian law that reduces them from the proto-slavery they had endured into a more serf-like peasantry. The social order of this age is therefore feudal.

In this growing class struggle between the serfs and the lords — who are clearly the proto-aristocrats — the aristocrats unite against the refugees and create what Vico calls heroic or aristocratic commonwealths, which he believes are the basis of most of the ancient Greek city-states and are to be found in pre-Republican Rome as well as in Homeric Greece. In such states, the heroes are the only magistrates and priests. They now consider themselves heroes, or sons of the gods, and make up a new patrician order — "patrician" deriving from "patriarch" — arrayed against the serfs who will become known in Rome as plebeians.

The human nature of this heroic epoch is proud and magnanimous — very much the character represented by figures like Hercules, Achilles, and even, to some extent, Aeneas. The law is based on exactly worded agreements rather than auspices. The rule continues

to be severe, but its goal is no longer based on superstition; it is now based on the desire for comfort. The mentality of this age is characterized by imagination — what Vico calls *poetic wisdom*, what we might call poetic creativity at the outset. This, of course, is the moment of great epic poetry. Over time, however, such a mentality moves toward a more practical rationality, as witnessed in the rise of early Greek philosophy and in the rationalization of legal mores in Rome. The emergence of the city-state represents ultimately the rise of a true nation or civilization. It is at this point that man has recovered from his true primitivism and is becoming a genuinely civilized being.

The Age of Men

This ushers in the third age, the Age of Men. Slowly but surely, Vico argues, the plebeians continue to fight for their rights, a process that passes through three essential stages modeled on the famous Struggle of the Orders between plebeians and patricians in Rome.

In the first stage, the plebeians insist on the right to solemnized marriages — the right to have their marriages recognized as legitimate. This is a difficult and violent struggle, and it is only when they threaten to withhold both their labor and their military service that the patricians are forced to give way and finally allow for the sacralization and solemnization of plebeian marriages, which ultimately results in laws permitting intermarriage between the social orders. The next demand of the plebeians is the right of citizenship — the right to vote, the right to some voice in the government — represented in the emergence of the *plebiscita*, the vote for the plebs, and of course their representative figures, the tribunes. Finally, the ultimate stage in this development is the acquiring of the right to hold office in the state by plebeians and commoners. It is at this

point that we see the full emergence of the so-called democratic republican city-state.

Vico calls this an Age of Men because it is only in this stage that civilization recognizes human equality — an equality based on reason and shared rationality rather than on shared religious tradition and custom. Old traditional laws, which were based on auspices and interpretations of divine will, are now refined and redefined as natural laws, as laws based purely on reason. Legal and political institutions become rationalized, naturalized, and more than anything humanized and universalized. It is also at this moment that high cultural institutions — academies — reach their zenith, and philosophy makes its emergence as a powerful and important form of cultural knowledge, doctrine, and inspiration.

This process culminates in the rise of democratic republics, and it is facilitated by the development of various character types among the rulers. Vico holds that the democratic republican institutions which represent the very flower of civilization are inherently unstable and produce changes in mentalities themselves among the rulers. The first of these rulers in the Age of Men are valorous and just — figures like Scipio Africanus or Pericles in Greece, who paved the road, as it were, to popular liberty. For Vico, this represents the development of the nation toward a fuller and richer equality, and the nature of such rulers is benign, as is the human nature of that moment.

But such popular liberty — like democracy itself — is for Vico always inherently unstable and always leads to growing internal division and civil war, because people cease to be loyal to the state and become increasingly self-interested and focused on their own agendas. This leads to the growth of social factions and to the famous civil wars that wracked Rome and, in fact, all of late Hellenic Greece.

This in turn leads to the second type of rulers: ambitious and great figures who will establish universal monarchies — monarchies that nonetheless retain the republican forms of law, which allow people to pursue self-interest and allow the government of the state to sustain itself. Representative figures here would be Alexander of Macedon and, of course, Julius and Augustus Caesar, who restore order to the disrupted, civil war-wracked city-state in the form of monarchies, but monarchies associated with civil rights. This represents something like the highest maturity of the political culture.

It is after this point that things begin to go downhill. Monarchies are firmly established by reflective and melancholy types like Tiberius, who represent the growing delicacy of the culture's nature as it sheds its severity and harshness and becomes more and more effete. These are ultimately destroyed by dissolute madmen whose delicacy produces insanity — figures like Nero or Caligula. Overall, the mentality of this epoch is characterized by reason or rationality, but eventually reason itself becomes purely skeptical and critical, and in so doing undermines the social bonds that are created by religion and tradition.

And this is Vico's deep critique of the Enlightenment: that once reason becomes skeptical and critical and eliminates what it calls superstition, it eliminates the very glue that had created social solidarity and allowed civilization to emerge in the first place. The result, with the dissolution of such religious bonds and the poetic wisdom of tradition from the Age of Heroes, is nothing so much as a barren intellectualism taking their place. Similarly, legal and social humanism become accompanied by a growing social and legal decadence and a concern for purely private interests. Ultimately, the society either disintegrates from within and collapses, or it is overrun from without because it lacks the social cohesion necessary for

military self-protection. The result is a new barbarism. The cycle has completed itself.

The Recourse of Institutions

It is at this point that we turn to the next stage. The course of history is followed by the *ricorso*, the recourse of institutions, in which a second barbarism begins and the process replicates itself through similar ages — though with some development toward the truth between cycles. Once a culture and nation has run its course, it continues to degenerate until it can recover that religious and primal spontaneity of the primitive mind, because it is that spontaneity which allows the re-emergence of the whole cycle. And that primitive spontaneity is always expressed as contact with God, with divine providence. It is at that moment that the whole process can begin again.

Thus, as Vico argues, after Rome disintegrated and was overrun by Germanic barbarians, the early Christian Church heralded a new Age of Gods among Europeans — with its auguries, and with the cult of relics, saints, and prophecies that clearly resemble in some ways the auguries of the ancient Romans. The next stage, the Age of Heroes, Vico finds in medieval Europe. The feudal social order corresponds to that found in ancient Mycenaean Greece, the Greece of the Homeric heroes — a society dominated by heroic aristocrats, in this case the chivalrous knights, who are nonetheless differentiated from their predecessors in the ancient world by being Christian. And in this sense there has been progress between the ages: our understanding of the divine becomes more and more accurate, more and more true.

Finally, the rise of absolute monarchy in the eighteenth century and the Age of Reason and philosophy herald the next Age of Men in Europe. And clearly, the rise of skeptical philosophies in figures like

Bayle, Pascal, and Descartes represents for Vico a danger sign for all of European civilization — that we may be headed once again toward decline.

Implications and Legacy

There are, I think, some quite profound implications to Vico's theory. Some are very important for the subsequent practice of historical and anthropological research. Vico teaches us to read documents like Homer's *Iliad* not only as works of art but as representations of a particular kind of mentality. Similarly, heraldic paraphernalia, etymology, and philology are all sources for reconstructing a past worldview — a worldview whose mentality may be in many ways antithetical or contrary to our own. And as I have argued, this really is the foundation of cultural history and anthropology to this day.

Contrary to Hobbes and Locke, Vico argues that political society is not the result of a social contract but is in fact the result of an evolutionary process — a rather slow one — emerging from customs and mores rather than from abstract rationality. And we come back again to that critical notion that it is faith and superstition which ultimately serve as the glue holding society together — a notion we will find repeated by conservatives like Burke, most notably.

The most important point with which to conclude, I think, is this: while philosophic criticism and speculation might be the real ultimate fruit of high civilization, it is a poisonous fruit in that it dissolves the irrational, customary, and religious beliefs that allow cultures and societies to develop and cohere.

In this way, Vico is establishing an important precedent for subsequent anti-moderns. This is a theme we will find in almost all of the critics of the Enlightenment — that they are compelled to deploy the very techniques of the Enlightenment to argue against it. So as

Vico deploys his new science of history to undermine skepticism, Berkeley will deploy empiricism to undermine naturalism, and Rousseau will deploy social contractarianism to undermine growing urbanism.

Having said this, Vico represents, I think, one of the most important challenges within the Enlightenment — and in some ways a trajectory of interpretation that remains important for us even today.

Lecture 41: Montesquieu and Political Thought

Professor Alan Kors

Introduction: Relativism and the Science of Society

We turn now to the subject of Montesquieu and political thought. Central to any consideration of Montesquieu is the problem of how a thinker who in many ways is one of the most relativistic thinkers of the eighteenth century is also a figure who is central to the foundation of the notion of a science of human society. And it is in that interesting tension between Montesquieu's relativism and his search for patterns, order, and laws of society that the drama of his political thinking can be found.

Let me quote Montesquieu at the outset, because I think it will show immediately how relativistic his thinking is, but also how that relativism leads to considerations of a general order and to statements that can be made truly or falsely about the nature of society. In his celebrated work *The Spirit of the Laws*, Montesquieu wrote:

It would be highly unlikely that the laws of one nation could suit another. Laws should be relative to the physical characteristics of the country, to the climate, to the quality of the terrain and its location and extent, to the style of life of its inhabitants, whether farmers, hunters, or shepherds, to the degree of liberty permitted by its constitution, to the inhabitants' religion, inclinations, riches, number, commerce, mores, and customs.

One sees there, at one and the same time, the relativism of Montesquieu's perspective and his search for knowable orders in society — things that can be true or false.

The Problem of Relativism

The problem of relativism for Montesquieu is the question of how much of human knowledge and experience is relative to time, place, and circumstance, and yet within that, how much we can know about the natural order of things. That problem, of course, is already inherent in Locke. Despite Locke's obvious encouragement of seeing knowledge as social and communicable, his epistemology carries within it so many of the seeds of relativism. If one's knowledge and moral ideas are bounded and determined by one's experience, then one's sense of the world, one's values, and one's beliefs are indeed relative to time, place, and personal experience.

Locke's doctrine of nominal and real essences establishes that all we ever know are the appearances of things. And Locke's doctrine even makes one's beliefs relative to the nature of the human senses. Locke himself had asked: what if a creature had a wholly different sensory perspective? What if, for example, human beings had microscopic eyes, or additional or fewer senses? How might the world and its values appear to them? One of Voltaire's popularizations of Locke imagined visitors to Earth from distant space who, despite exponentially longer lives and thousands of senses, lament their ignorance and how bound they are by their relative lack of knowledge.

What also feeds the growing sense of the relativism of social and cultural phenomena for Europe is Europe's own encounter with foreign and, in its sense, exotic peoples. The effect of this encounter is multiplied by the growth of printing and of the reading public, and it produces a curiosity — indeed an astonishment — over differences among cultures, an awareness also that European travelers seemed as strange to others as those others did to them, and an intense European curiosity about how the world would look if one had been born elsewhere.

Europeans are struck by variety in what had seemed to them essential things: differences in the treatment of women and the elderly, the diversity of the world's religions, moral codes and beliefs, the difficulties of translating essential concepts in one culture into the language of another, and indeed the very flourishing of non-Christian cultures — astonishing to a civilization that had believed Christianity essential to any culture's ability to persist in civilized fashion.

Europe is becoming aware of chronologies different from its own. Voltaire begins his own history of the world not with the Jews, but with China. And if one looks at the reading public's taste and fancy, bestsellers of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century include *The Turkish Spy* — the central figure of which is a spy from the Turkish court reporting back on how Europe appears to him — *The Thousand and One Nights* of Scheherazade, and accounts of American Indians and their culture.

Personal Sources of Montesquieu's Relativism

Montesquieu participates in all of these cultural and intellectual currents, but there are also personal sources of his relativism. His background makes him particularly sensitive to difference and to the particularity of experience.

For example, he is born into the milieu of the Parlement of Bordeaux in the southwest of France. The French parlements were courts of appeal that ruled according to local tradition and custom, and no edict of the king was law in a region — a province of France — unless registered by the parlement as consistent with that region's own traditions. Louis XIV in the seventeenth century had overridden and bullied the parlements of France, reducing them to obedience and submission. But after his death, the great parlements of France

began to reassert themselves. Growing up in that milieu — indeed participating in it — inculcates an awareness of absolutism, of arbitrary power, of local privilege, of local custom.

Further, Montesquieu marries a woman who is a Huguenot, a French Protestant, which deepens his awareness of issues of toleration and of how much follows from the accident of birth.

When as a young man he comes to Paris, he meets, becomes fascinated by, and forms close friendships with a remarkable group of researchers at the Royal Academy of Inscriptions. Officially, their role was to decipher for the crown various ancient medals, coins, and records of the past that the monarchy had come into possession of. But in terms of studying the chronologies of cultures and the nature of past civilizations, the scholars at the Academy of Inscriptions became students of comparative ancient religions and beliefs. They were shocked by — and wrote privately about, and widely discussed with Montesquieu — their sense of the functional resemblance of cultures. Each has a clergy; each has an explanation of the creation; each has a justification of its political structure; yet all of these are substantively different in the particular.

There are even personal friendships in Montesquieu's case that deeply affect his sense of the relativity of things and fascinate him about how one culture can perceive and think about another. One of his close friends in Paris was a Chinese scholar who managed the King's Chinese Library, a man who had converted to Christianity in China and could not wait to get to Europe. Having been converted to Christianity, he expected to find a nation in which, if struck on the cheek, everyone turned the other cheek; in which, asked to carry something a mile, one carried it two; in which everyone — a society of believing Christians — was motivated by charity, kindness, love, and the Sermon on the Mount. He was, it suffices to say, quite astonished by what he discovered. And his astonishment raised very

deep and fascinating questions for Montesquieu about how it is that belief and practice can so diverge, and how odd that divergence must seem to someone coming from another culture.

Montesquieu's Major Works

In the 1720s, building on all of these experiences, Montesquieu burst upon the literary and intellectual scene in France by publishing a work called *The Persian Letters*, which enjoyed an extraordinary literary success. The structure of the work is that of an epistolary novel in which Persian travelers — creations of Montesquieu — see France and the West through Persian eyes, and write back to Persia and to each other about their experiences. This structure gives Montesquieu great freedom to comment both on his world and to deepen his reader's sense of the relativity of belief to time and to place.

In the substance of *The Persian Letters*, Montesquieu uses relativism to great satiric effect. His Persians look at the Pope, the King, nobles, and bishops through Persian eyes, with no European, French, or Christian preconceptions. Their comments shock and titillate a French audience. The Pope is a magician — he makes people think that three is one, the doctrine of the Trinity. The king is an even better magician: by debasing the currency, he can make people think that ten is one. And the bishops are people who gather together to make the laws of the church and then separate to sell dispensations from those same laws. That is how it looks through Persian eyes.

The work also raises the humor and the deeper question of ethnocentrism. A Frenchman, discovering that one of these travelers is in fact Persian, says to him, "How could anyone be a Persian?" — an ultimate expression of ethnocentric self-enclosure. But Montesquieu is above all concerned with the deepest questions of

relativism: what is in fact relative to time and place in human affairs, and what is natural and absolute?

Montesquieu wants to know and to distinguish between what is malleable, plastic, and changeable in human life, and what is in fact common to all human experience. In three works in particular, he will seek to reconcile the order of nature with the variety of human forms of association. These are *The Persian Letters*, published in 1721; *Considerations on the Greatness of the Romans and Their Decline*, published in 1734; and his monumental work *The Spirit of the Laws*, published in 1748.

Science as a Unifying Truth

One of the central views that animates all three of these works is that amid the relativity of human perspective, there is a science that offers a unifying truth. One examines the religions of various cultures — they all make different and often mutually incompatible claims. But the laws that natural philosophy has discovered, of gravity, of motion, the laws of dynamics and pneumatics, are demonstrable across cultural boundaries and apply everywhere to everyone. Gravity does not simply obtain in a Christian country while Muslims and Buddhists float about without natural order. There is a unifying natural reality to the world, and science offers that unifying truth.

Applied to the study of the varieties of human societies, we are able in Montesquieu's thought to look at the varieties of human behavior — and above all the dramatic record of ancient history — and to derive from that a model of social phenomena, then to attempt to move toward a science of society. There is a regularity that we can discern in human nature. But that human nature exists in a stunning variety of circumstances, and the task of the student of society is to

recognize what common forms and common laws are at work beneath the surface differences of human affairs.

The Classification of Political Forms

Montesquieu strikes out in bold and original directions when he decides to classify the essential varieties of human political association not by their structure of power, but by what he calls the spirit that animates them — the spirit that is essential to their existence. His fundamental distinction is that all societies may be divided into three types: republics, in which either the whole people (a democracy) or some part of the people (an aristocracy) rule; monarchies, in which there is the rule of one man guided by law, custom, and intermediary institutions of power; and despotisms, in which human beings are governed by the will and caprice of a single individual with absolute dominion over their lives.

Different spirits animate each of these forms of human association. Essential to republics is virtue — a concern for the common good, a concern for the business of the public, the *res publica*, the public business. Virtue is the principle of republican government. Monarchies depend upon honor: obedience to the rule of law, acceptance of the obligations of the rule of law, and the existence of intermediary institutions — courts, aristocracies, parlements — all bound by honor. Absent honor, the whole system would fail. And despotisms are always governed by fear alone.

The problem of human history for Montesquieu is the instability of these forms, and most tragically the fact that what would seem morally the most desirable — a democratic republic animated by the virtue of all — is one of the least stable forms of human association, though all of them carry within them the seeds of their own

instability and destruction. And that instability allows us to understand predictable cycles of human history.

The Cycles of History

Let us imagine a people governed by fear and one ruler. At some point that fear weakens, despotism is overthrown, and eventually people find their way to self-governance as the alternative. But in self-governance they create the seeds for later instabilities and transformations.

In *The Persian Letters*, Montesquieu relates this through the story of the Troglodytes, an ancient people who overthrow a king and, after a period of anarchy, come to self-government — because absent virtue, honor, or fear, their anarchic state cannot survive. They cannot cohere as a society. No one fulfills an obligation, no one protects anyone else, no one honors a contract, no one will come back and do business with the Troglodytes a second time. By a kind of natural selection, the virtuous survive, and there is a period of self-government. But self-governance and virtue produce prosperity. Free, virtuous people prosper. And prosperity produces selfishness, avarice, greed, and a laziness about the public business. The Troglodytes therefore seek a king, who says: "I will be bound by your laws. But this is the saddest day in history. You are no longer virtuous enough to govern yourselves." And he predicts the cycle that will lead back to despotism.

For Montesquieu, this is the case of Rome as well. The virtue of the Roman Republic made it the most formidable force in the ancient world. It defended itself so successfully, and then it conquered. As it conquered and increased in size, militarism, and wealth, it lost the virtue that animated the republic, which could no longer sustain itself — leading to the cycle of monarchy and then to despotism.

In *The Spirit of the Laws*, Montesquieu asks the question: but historians tell us again and again that there is so much chance, so much contingency to history. True, he answers. There are such contingencies, such a role of chance in history. But consider: if one says that this republic or this empire fell because it lost a battle, one must ask the deeper structural question — what kind of society falls from the loss of one battle? What kind of society put itself in that situation?

For Montesquieu, there is a scientific and tragic lesson in the study of human affairs: there is an independent natural reality in which behaviors have real consequences, and which points toward universal values. Human societies indeed can achieve any number of forms, but they cannot survive unless they solve the problem of linking the individual to the broader society, of security, of equity, of justice. Such success, however, given human nature, will not be permanent. Virtue at some point weakens. Monarchy at some point becomes despotism. Despotism at some point is overthrown when fear is weakened, producing anarchy and a whole new cycle of human phenomena.

Despotism and the Separation of Powers

Despotism is a problem that quite obsesses Montesquieu. All cultures in general, and power in particular, tend to assume that their particular forms of association are natural, and they never see despotism in their own behaviors. Usbek, the Persian traveler of *The Persian Letters*, sees all the despotism that exists in France, and yet sees his own absolute authority over eunuchs and women in the harem as completely natural. But despotism is an awful thing. It is the subjection of one person's life to the whim and caprice of another's will. When a despot is unable to exercise terror, freedom

reasserts itself against arbitrary will. Only terror can make despotism seem stable and permanent.

How can one overcome this tendency toward despotism in human affairs? For Montesquieu, there must be rights and law without anarchy — that is the goal. And secondly, to correct the tendency of every form of power to degenerate, there must be a separation of powers. The ideal would be to have a popular power, an aristocratic or senatorial power, and a monarchical or executive power — separated, each acting as a check and balance upon the other.

With that phrase, one can understand full well the influence of Montesquieu upon the American Revolution and the founders of the American Republic, who indeed read Montesquieu with extraordinary passion and attention. They found in him a naturalism — the conviction that it was the task of the founders of this new republic to learn from nature, to learn from the past, not to idealize man, and to project checks and balances with full awareness that they were under the necessity of mutual restraints upon centers of power, so that each might prevent the degeneration of the other. But they knew also, full well, that any experiment in self-government depended in the final analysis upon virtue, and that absent public virtue and respect for law, nothing on paper could be permanent or indeed even stable.

Lecture 42: The Worldly Philosophy of Bernard Mandeville

Professor Darren Stalloff

Introduction

In our last lecture, we examined the thought of Montesquieu and his political speculations — one of the most influential and respectable figures in the Enlightenment. In this lecture, we examine the thought of Bernard Mandeville, who was every bit as influential, but had a rather different reputation, one less respectable and more notorious.

Indeed, Bernard Mandeville was once described — and I think somewhat admiringly — as the wickedest writer in the English language, not only because of the worldliness of his thought, but also because of the satirical frankness of his prose. Mandeville was in many ways the Machiavelli or Hobbes of the eighteenth century: a notorious thinker who pushed the thought of his age to the limits of social acceptability and respectability.

Both his thought and his career exemplify several important central themes of the Enlightenment — in particular, its quest for a truly secular and scientific moral and political order. His most famous work, *The Fable of the Bees*, created a new consequentialist mode of philosophy in ethics that was both secular and Epicurean — that is, oriented towards pleasure. The implications and influences of his work were profound and far-reaching.

Life and Career

Let us begin with Mandeville's life and career, because as I mentioned, it does exemplify several of the important features of the

Enlightenment, particularly in early eighteenth-century England.

The first such feature is urban cosmopolitanism, and with it the desire for a well-rounded universal knowledge. Although he wrote wonderfully playful English verse and prose, Mandeville was actually Dutch. Born in Rotterdam in 1670, he moved to London after completing his university education. This is significant because Rotterdam was an important commercial city in what was at the time the foremost commercial society and power in seventeenth-century Europe. He moved to London self-consciously, just as it came to eclipse Amsterdam as the center of Western European commerce. He adopted England as his new nation at precisely the moment that Great Britain superseded the Protestant Netherlands as the foremost maritime and commercial nation in Europe.

Mandeville's move therefore exemplifies a sort of urban cosmopolitanism — cosmopolitan because he is not tied to ethnic nationalism, and urban because he clearly embraced the fashionable life of the town over the simpler rusticity of country life, an embrace emblematic of the urban sophistication associated with Addison, Steele, and life in the great cities.

As for his academic background, Mandeville studied at the prestigious University of Leiden, where he trained as a physician. But he was not only a physician — he certainly was that, and wrote medical treatises in Latin — he was in addition abreast of all the scientific revolutions of his time, and read widely in philosophy. Three figures in particular merit mention: Descartes, Spinoza, and Bayle. I mention them because it is important to remember that in the late seventeenth century the Netherlands was in many ways the center of European speculation. Descartes, though a Frenchman, lived in the Netherlands, a place that was culturally tolerant. Spinoza lived in Amsterdam. And Bayle, again a Frenchman, lived in the Netherlands and actually taught at Leiden. It is not certain whether

Mandeville studied directly with Bayle, but he clearly read him with great intensity and cites him constantly.

In addition to his scientific and philosophical background, Mandeville was also a belletrist, fully acquainted with all of the polite and enlightened writings of his time. He references Pope, Addison, and Steele. Similarly, his political posture is emblematic of much that was central to the Enlightenment — in particular, its defense of a modern commercial republicanism against the older ancient and Renaissance classical republican values.

A client of the Earl of Macclesfield, who was the Lord Chancellor of England, Mandeville was in politics an outspoken Court Whig. The Court Whigs were the ruling hierarchy, or dominant party, under the Hanoverians in the eighteenth century, and they were widely perceived as representing a new commercial and financial oligarchy that had come to dominate Great Britain. They were opposed, however, by two groups: the Tories, and the so-called Country opposition. These groups objected to the commercialization of British politics and society, feeling that commercial development had resulted in political corruption and the destruction of civic virtues. These views are most famously associated in the eighteenth century with the writings of Henry St. John, Viscount Bolingbroke, who wrote *The Craftsman* and *The Idea of a Patriot King*, and they have an obvious lineage running from Machiavelli and the Renaissance through James Harrington and Algernon Sidney.

Mandeville rejected this appeal to the older Renaissance values of civic humanism and classical virtues as fundamentally antithetical to the commercial prosperity, national greatness, and modern republicanism that he thought one could find in Augustan England. And like Hume after him, Mandeville came to see that a certain amount of what the Country opposition called corruption — what we today call patronage — was in fact necessary to oil the machinery of

executive ministerial government, just as he also argued that a certain amount of private selfishness, egocentrism, and chicanery was essential to a prosperous commercial society.

Finally, Mandeville's literary career exemplifies a new and emerging social role in the Enlightenment: that of the gentleman of letters, the early English version of what the French would later call the *philosophe*. Mandeville's works were widely read and discussed in polite London society, and from his publications he was actually able to generate financial income, which allowed him to achieve a position of independence critical to this new role. The gentleman of letters would engage in epistolary exchanges and philosophical debates with other key figures in the English Enlightenment, and Mandeville certainly did this — it was considered exercising one's franchise in the newly emerging republic of letters. And of course Mandeville was also a participant in the most important social phenomena of the Enlightenment: the emergence of associational cultures — salons, Masonic lodges, and above all clubs and coffee houses.

Indeed, one of the few people who actually gave us a first-hand recollection of Mandeville was our own Benjamin Franklin, who, while he was in London, visited Mandeville's club and attested that Mandeville was the very soul of his club because he was, in Franklin's words, "a most facetious and entertaining fellow."

The Fable of the Bees: The Grumbling Hive

Mandeville's most famous work, *The Fable of the Bees*, presented his central paradox in moral theory: namely, that private vices make public benefits.

Mandeville's ethical theory would turn out to be critical to the development of what is called consequentialism — a new way of

thinking about how to judge moral actions. Traditionally, philosophers had judged moral actions on the basis of the intentions, purposes, or motivations of the actor. If one acted out of duty, one acted deontologically, and such an act was virtuous independent of what came of it. Mandeville inverts that procedure. He argues, in fact, that the road to hell is paved with good intentions, and that we ought to judge actions on the basis of their consequences — their results, the fruits of actions.

The text of *The Fable of the Bees* was actually composed of a variety of much shorter works compiled and added on as the book went through various editions. The argument first appears in 1705, when Mandeville published a brief poem of about twenty pages called *The Grumbling Hive: or, Knaves Turn'd Honest*. *The Grumbling Hive* is in fact a fable in verse which first proposes the paradox that private vices make public benefits, and rejects the Country critique of urban commercialism and the vice of selfishness.

The poem describes a beehive that is both rich, powerful, and learned — the most elite in the arts and sciences — and free. Clearly this beehive is meant to represent contemporary Great Britain:

A spacious hive well stocked with bees, that lived in luxury and ease, and yet as famed for laws and arms, as yielding large and early swarms, was counted the great nursery of sciences and industry. No bees had better government, more fickleness, or less content. They were not slaves to tyranny, nor ruled by wild democracy, but kings that could not wrong because their power was circumscribed by laws.

The vast population of this hive lives by fulfilling the commercial and luxurious needs of one another:

Vast numbers thronged the fruitful hive, yet those vast numbers made them thrive. Millions endeavoring to supply each other's lust and vanity, while other millions were employed to see their handiworks

destroyed. They furnished half the universe, yet had more work than laborers.

By "lust and vanity" he means the lust for conspicuous consumption — to be in the latest mode in clothing, furniture, and housing. His point is that it is exactly that lust and conspicuous consumption, what we today call consumer culture, which fuels free markets.

In particular, Mandeville goes through the particular vices he finds in England. So while he praises Augustan England, in no way is he willing to soft-pedal its viciousness. It is not only criminals, charlatans, and financial speculators who are oriented around selfishness, but lawyers, clerics, laborers, physicians, and politicians — all exploit, defraud, and employ each other. Indeed, even justice itself is corrupt and can be purchased for gold:

Justice herself, famed for fair dealing, by blindness had not lost her feeling. Her left hand, which the scale should hold, had often dropped them, bribed with gold. Yet it was thought the sword she bore checked but the desperate and the poor.

So he acknowledges all the real flaws that the Country opposition had pointed out about Augustan England — its corruption, its selfishness, its vice. Yet when put together, despite the vicious habits of the bees, or perhaps because of them, the overall effect is publicly beneficial:

Thus every part was full of vice, yet the whole mass a paradise. Flattered in peace and feared in wars, they were the esteem of foreigners, and lavish of their wealth and lives, the balance of all other hives. Such were the blessings of that state. Their crimes conspired to make them great.

What happens to the hive? The gods — in particular Jove — hearing the constant and hypocritical complaints about corruption and vice, decide to punish the bees by eliminating all dishonesty from the

hive. Clearly these complaints are meant to represent the voice of the Country opposition. And what are the results of a re-emergence of virtue and honesty? They are tragic. Honesty depresses prices and trade, precisely because there is no chicanery and no bargaining. The professions are also destroyed. Lawyers no longer enter frivolous suits; those who can pay their debts do so and have no need of lawyers. Only physicians who actually know medicine are willing to practice, which eliminates the great majority of all practitioners. Patronage in government is destroyed, leading to the massive unemployment of all those who had depended on it. The decline of luxury and fashion destroys the clothing and building trades, and with that comes the destruction of the maritime trades, and with that comes the decline of population:

So few in the vast hive remain, the hundredth part they can't maintain. Against the insults of numerous foes, whom yet they valiantly oppose, till some well-fenced retreat is found, and here they die or stand their ground.

The moral of the story Mandeville states plainly in his concluding verse:

Then leave complaints, fools only strive, to make a great and honest hive. To enjoy the world's conveniencies, be famed in war yet live in ease, without great vices is a vain utopia seated in the brain.

His point is that you cannot have greatness and honesty and virtue simultaneously. The key to greatness and prosperity is a restrained vice, a restrained selfishness: *vice is beneficial found when it's by justice lopped and bound. Nay, where the people would be great, as necessary to the state as hunger is to make them eat.*

The Enquiry into the Origin of Moral Virtue

In 1714, Mandeville reissued the poem with a series of explanatory appendices and a new essay called *An Enquiry into the Origin of Moral Virtue*, and published this compilation under the new title, *The Fable of the Bees*.

Mandeville's *Enquiry* rejects social contractarianism — the theory that moral virtues and moral codes derive either from natural laws that are immanent to reason, or from public deliberations also grounded in reason. Instead, Mandeville opts for a different account of the origin of moral virtue, one based on cultural evolution. That cultural evolution is in turn grounded in a new scientific associational psychology, very much like what we find in Spinoza, which stresses the selfishness and egocentrism of the individual. Here we see Mandeville first proposing what classical economics would later call *homo economicus* — man as a rationally self-interested and egocentric being.

Mandeville's psychology is clearly meant to be both empirical and scientific in the sense that it is based on observation rather than pure philosophical speculation. As he states in the introduction, "most writers are always teaching men what they should be and hardly ever trouble their heads with telling them what they really are." His point — a point that Spinoza had first proposed and that we will find again in Hume — is that reason is generally the servant of desire, and that what is determinative in human behavior are the passions, and selfish passions in particular:

I believe man to be a compound of various passions, that all of them, as they are provoked and come uppermost, govern him by turns, whether he will or no.

This is a psychology that is deterministic and that treats humans as another kind of animal. And indeed this is part of Mandeville's

central argument: since every animal seeks to gratify its pleasures, the key to social life for humans is teaching them somehow that "it is more beneficial for everybody to conquer than indulge his appetites, and much better to mind the public than what seemed his private interest."

This is no small trick. How does one teach people that what they recognize as their own selfish self-interest is not, in fact, what they ought to desire or what will make them happiest? Mandeville argues that the key to this development was the work of great politicians, lawmakers, and wise men who were able to domesticate man by appealing to his pride and flattering it. Central to this is what Mandeville sees as the egocentric power of praise to make us feel good about ourselves, and our corresponding desire to avoid shame.

Such politicians claim that our reason and understanding make us superior to animals — a distinction we saw in Plato and in many philosophers, the idea that what separates humans from the rest of creation is that we are rational animals, capable of following our reason wherever it leads. Having made this distinction between us and the rest of the animals, they then distinguish between two types of people: the lower, who are incapable of self-denial and follow their appetites; and the higher, who are — again like Plato's philosopher-kings — "lofty, high-spirited creatures, free from sordid selfishness, who esteem the improvements of the mind to be their fairest possessions."

It is pride, therefore, that induces those who aspire to high status to emulate this ideal of the fully spiritual and rational being. It is pride that domesticates and conquers the selfishness of the individual. In the same way, it is pride that induces even the lower orders to try to emulate those higher types — or at least, if they cannot avoid vice, to hypocritically try to hide and conceal it.

Both of these processes — inducing the higher types to genuinely overcome their natures, and the lower types to at least pretend they have done so — ultimately serve the interests of the ambitious and do so by making the mass of people more tractable:

The first rudiments of morality, broached by skillful politicians, to render men useful to each other as well as tractable, were chiefly contrived that the ambitious might reap the more benefit from and govern vast numbers of them with the greater ease and security. The foundation of politics being once laid, it is impossible that man should long remain uncivilized.

After that breakthrough, people discover that "whenever they checked their inclinations or but followed them with more circumspection, they avoided a world of troubles and often escaped many of the calamities that generally attended the too eager pursuit after pleasure."

This may seem a somewhat abstract argument, and part of what makes Mandeville so powerful a writer is his ability to flesh out his abstract principles with everyday examples. He gives the example of a young girl being taught to curtsy:

When an awkward girl, before she can either speak or go, begins after many entreaties to make the first rude essays of curtsying, the nurse falls in an ecstasy of praise. "There's a delicate curtsy. Oh, fine, miss. There's a pretty lady. Mama, miss can make a better curtsy than her sister Molly." The same is echoed over by the maids, whilst Mama almost hugs the child to pieces. Only Miss Molly, who being four years older knows how to make a very handsome curtsy, wonders at the perverseness of their judgment, and swelling with indignation is ready to cry at the injustice done her. Till, being whispered in the ear that it is only to please the baby, and that she is a woman, she grows proud at being let into the secret, and rejoicing at the superiority of her

understanding, repeats what has been said with large additions, and insults over the weakness of her sister, whom all the while she fancies to be the only bubble among them.

Mandeville's point, of course, is that we are all bubbles — we are all like both of those sisters, flattered into doing things which, by our nature, we would not choose to do. Thus he concludes: "the moral virtues are the political offspring which flattery begot upon pride."

Implications and Influences

Now I want to turn to some of the implications of Mandeville's work and the extent of its influence.

First, Mandeville's rigorous description of virtue as the overcoming of one's nature — a strict rigorism — and his focus on consequences were meant to reveal the fundamental tension between, on the one hand, the Judeo-Christian and classical ideals of virtue associated with Neo-Stoicism and Ciceronianism, and, on the other hand, the realities of modern commercial and secular society. Mandeville tried to heighten this contradiction in order to force us to choose the latter over the former — to recognize that if we want to be part of a modern commercial society, we must learn to abandon the ancient modes of virtue and moral codes. In this way, again, he is entirely typical of the Enlightenment in embracing the moderns and modernity over the ancients and classicism.

Mandeville's evolutionary conception of society and the moral order that follows from it created the theoretical possibility of recognizing economic progress as a feature of modern life. Up to this point, although economies had begun to become dynamic, very few people had recognized that theoretically. Mandeville was the first, and once that recognition is made, we see the framework laid out for the development of classical economics. Indeed, his consequential

calculation of unintended results — the ways in which private selfishness produces public benefits on a large social or macro scale — obviously formed the basis of the mode of reasoning that we now know as classical economics. His work would have a profound effect on economic thinkers from Adam Smith to David Ricardo, and even up to Friedrich Hayek in the twentieth century, who wrote about Mandeville and clearly learned a great deal from him. Mandeville's influence was also felt not only by Smith, but by his friend David Hume as well.

In many ways, Mandeville's consequentialism was the first truly bourgeois moral philosophy, and I want to argue this in three different senses. First, Mandeville's consequentialism reflects the instrumental rationality of the bourgeois entrepreneur — the man who must always act with an eye to the consequences or results of his actions, whose notion of rationality is always instrumental: if I do this, I will get that. But it is also bourgeois in that it proposes a moral standard commensurate with commercial life: if we insist on complete honesty in all trade, how will a merchant ever mark up his goods? How will he profit? And if he cannot profit, he will not trade. And if there is no trade, there is no commerce. And if there is no commerce, there is very little employment. Thirdly, it obviates the one feature always used to criticize the bourgeoisie and capitalism itself — namely, that it is a system based on selfishness and greed. While people were willing to acknowledge the dynamism of the newly emerging commercial economy, they nonetheless looked down their noses at its practitioners precisely because they lacked the virtues of gentlemen. Mandeville was the first to point out that private greed can work for the public good. That famous line from the film *Wall Street*, in which the character Gordon Gekko argues that greed works, traces a trajectory of argument that begins with Mandeville.

Mandeville's worldliness, his deflationary and naturalistic account of human behavior, and his account of motivation also had an immense influence on the Continent. Worldly figures like Voltaire, d'Holbach, and Helvétius all drew heavily from Mandeville, celebrating his free thinking, his willingness to transcend the categories of classical virtue, and his readiness to ignore the injunctions of traditional Christianity.

On the other hand, his work also had a significant negative impact. By pointing out the extreme implications of enlightened rationalism in social science, Mandeville made it clear for those who were uncomfortable with those implications that the Enlightenment itself was problematic. Figures like Rousseau would be eager to reject his consequentialism and to embrace a new form of older classical virtues. Bishop Berkeley, whom we will look at in our next lecture, also wrote in response to Mandeville. Berkeley saw that Mandeville had shown how the metaphysics of modern science would produce a purely secular worldview quite hostile to traditional Christianity — and this led Berkeley to develop an argument against mechanistic materialism itself, in favor of philosophical idealism.

Kant's famous moral philosophy at the end of the century — his formulation of a deontological ethic — was also clearly meant to contain the consequentialism and psychological moral theorizing that Mandeville and after him Hume had popularized. And indeed Kant is strikingly similar to Mandeville in that both accept rigorism: the view that acts which appear virtuous but are done out of inclination rather than a rational desire to be good are not genuinely virtuous, however beneficial they may be.

Finally, Mandeville's consequentialism, combined with his stress on public benefits, resulted in a new way of thinking about society that we might describe as social Epicureanism: rather than seeking a social order that is in some sense just or fair, or one that produces

good people, we ought instead to seek a social, political, and moral order that produces pleasure. Pleasure is ultimately what motivates the human being, and therefore what satisfies human beings in a social order is a social order that maximizes pleasures. If you maximize pleasures over the largest possible number of people, as Mandeville does, then you are arguing that what is best is that which results in the greatest public benefits. This is the very essence of utilitarianism — the belief that the very best policy is that which produces the greatest pleasure for the greatest number. It is quite striking that what was considered scandalous in the eighteenth century when Mandeville composed it would in the nineteenth century become commonplace in the work of Jeremy Bentham, James Mill, and of course his famous son John Stuart Mill.

And like Bentham after him, Mandeville was democratic in his Epicureanism. He refused to rank pleasures. He believed that if the majority of people preferred pushpin to Shakespeare — the example that both Bentham and Mill would analyze — then there was no way of choosing between them. There is no disputing about tastes.

Conclusion

Mandeville's life not only exemplifies parts of the Enlightenment, and his thought not only exemplifies several of its central themes, but his influence — even to this day — shows the extent to which the Enlightenment really does introduce us to a new modern age: an age of secularity not only in the sciences, but in the humanities and in our understanding of the moral world.

Lecture 43: Bishop Berkeley, Idealism, and the Critique of the Enlightenment

Professor Darren Stalloff

Introduction

In our last lecture, we examined the thought of Bernard Mandeville, and we saw that Mandeville's philosophy supported the moral secularism and materialism that characterized the Enlightenment as it reacted against received Christian and scholastic tradition. In this lecture, we are going to examine one of the Enlightenment's most profound critics: Bishop George Berkeley, who opposed the rising metaphysic of the Enlightenment — that metaphysic being mechanistic materialism — precisely because he thought it resulted in the growth of both skepticism and, even worse, atheism and libertinism.

Berkeley is an interesting figure. He is one of the first spokesmen for a metaphysical posture known as absolute idealism, an extremely abstract and abstruse doctrine, but one that is nonetheless important, particularly in the nineteenth century. And it is for that reason that we will be looking at Berkeley in the eighteenth century, because he not only allows us to see a criticism of the Enlightenment — one of the rising sense of reaction against its excesses — but also because as an empiricist, he gives us a relatively accessible way of approaching idealism.

We are going to look in particular at four issues. First, how does Berkeley deploy Lockean empiricism? We will see this with regard to one specific issue: how he refutes the Lockean doctrine of abstract ideas. Second, we will look at his critique of materialism and what he offers in its stead — his argument for idealism. Third, we will examine

how he uses idealism to support a pietistic worldview. And finally, we will examine some of what were, at least for Berkeley, the benefits of an idealist philosophy.

Berkeley's Deployment of Lockean Empiricism: The Refutation of Abstract Ideas

Let us begin with the first issue: Berkeley's deployment of Lockean empiricist phenomenology and epistemology. You will recall from Professor Kors's lecture that Locke viewed the mind of an infant as a *tabula rasa* — a blank slate — by which he meant that all of our ideas and all of our knowledge arise from sense experience. This was, of course, where he departed from the seventeenth-century rationalist position, which had believed in innate ideas. We will see that Berkeley not only adopted that Lockean position of the *tabula rasa*, and with it the empiricist phenomenology and epistemology, but was in fact probably even more rigorous and adept at deploying it than Locke himself had been. The example we are going to examine is the treatment of abstract ideas.

What are abstract ideas, and what is the issue involved? It has to do with what the medievals called the problem of universals. There are certain terms in our language which do not seem to name individual entities — they refer to what we might call general concepts or classes of entities. Think of the word *humanity* or *mankind*, the word *justice*, or the word *beauty*. How are we to interpret such words?

The tradition that Plato had argued for, if you will recall, was the realist position: that those words refer to real entities, and if we do not come across them in our physical experience, then we should expect to find them in some other realm, perhaps a metaphysical realm. That position is called realism — universal terms have real reference. We today do not debate the issue of universals in quite

the same form, but we do so in an attenuated way with respect to numbers. That is a useful way to think about it: do things like one, two, and three refer to real objects or not? If you are a realist, you think that in some metaphysical sense numbers genuinely exist.

Locke had rejected that position of realism in favor of what he called conceptualism, which treated universals as nominal essences — or, as Berkeley calls them, abstract ideas — rather than as real subsistent entities. His notion was that you do not actually come across a one, a two, or a three in experience. You do not come across a universal humanity, beauty, or justice. But you can form those universal concepts in your mind on the basis of your particular experiences, and therefore such entities exist only in your mind and not in the world. That is a sort of middle ground between realism on the one hand and the very radical position we will see Berkeley takes, which is nominalism.

Indeed, we will see that Berkeley criticized such abstract ideas as a half-hearted compromise with realism. Instead, he insisted on a thoroughgoing reduction to particular sense experience, and that results in what we will call nominalism. In brief, nominalism means that universal terms are just names that name nothing specific. If anything, they refer to classes of entities.

What I want to show you is how Berkeley uses the Lockean empiricist phenomenology to destroy Locke's own doctrine of abstract ideas. Begin with this assumption: if all of our ideas arise, as Locke had argued, either directly or indirectly from our impressions or sense data — of which they are presumably copies — then it is impossible for us, Berkeley will argue, to have an abstract idea, because all of our sense data are always particular.

Since our ideas are mental representations, or images, to have an abstract idea would be to have an abstract image or representation.

Take the notion of *man*. If you were to form an image or representation of a man that was neither white nor black nor any other pigmentation, neither tall nor short, neither male nor female, neither clothed nor unclothed, neither heavy nor thin, Berkeley would argue that if you can form such a concept in your mind, you are probably suffering from some form of mental illness. In reality, all of our images and representations are always particular. It is therefore impossible for the mind to create such an abstract image in the imagination. Any attempt to do so is illusory.

The Critique of Materialism and the Argument for Idealism

Let me turn now to the second issue: the critique of materialism and the argument for idealism.

Berkeley argued that if you are going to be consistent in your empiricism — if you are going to accept the argument that all of our ideas are reducible to sense — then you cannot avoid the conclusion that the only phenomena of which we are immediately aware are our ideas. And if you remember what Locke meant by ideas, as Professor Kors explained, they are phenomenal experiences, experiences of immediate sense derived from our five sense data.

Berkeley tries to argue that, given that immediate experience from our five senses, the inference from that to materialism is in fact a dogmatic superstition. As a result, we must conclude that matter is what he called an occult substratum — a metaphysical dogma. The doctrine Berkeley is advancing is known as absolute idealism. Let me present the argument in some detail.

If all of the sensible objects of which we are aware are comprised of ideas derived from sense, then this podium would be made up of a

set of discrete sense phenomena for us: the various colors that we see when we look at it from various angles, the smooth textures of its surface, perhaps the sounds produced by rapping on it. Presumably we would not normally engage in olfactory inspection or taste, but if we needed to, perhaps we could. That is what makes up the sum of our idea of this object. Similarly, if I were to point to this rather handsome coffee mug, it would be made up of a sum of sense experiences — the smooth textures on the outside, the range of colors you experience when you look at it, its particular weight, and so forth.

Note that when we look at both the lectern and the coffee mug, we find that we never actually experience matter. We experience smooth textures, colors, and so on, but never matter itself. The question then is: how did we ever arrive at the idea of matter?

Remember, Locke had argued that all of our ideas must be derivable from sense. So we are left with the question: how did we derive the idea of matter from sense? What color is matter? What flavor is it? What does it feel like? Of course, matter has no particular flavor, no particular odor, no particular texture, no particular sound, no particular color. And for that very reason, it cannot really be reduced to sensory experience. What Berkeley shows is that matter is in fact a posit — a conjecture we make to explain what unifies the various set of sense experiences we find in objects. We look at an object like a coffee mug or a lectern, we see it is made up of a variety of sensible particulars, and we decide that there must be something which they hang on or which unifies them — hence, matter. But matter itself is never sensed.

Moreover, Berkeley argues that sensible objects are not in fact unified by this substratum of matter, but by constant conjunction. And again, that is an important point that he advances and that we will see developed in Hume as well: what actually unifies our

experience of the lectern is the fact that the various ranges of colors, textures, and sounds produced by rapping on it always coincide with our experience of this particular object. Similarly with the coffee mug. We do not in fact need to posit matter to hold these material objects together. We can simply reduce them to the sum of particular sensory experiences we have of them.

If that is the case, then Berkeley proceeds to apply something known as Occam's Razor. This is a very sharp piece of reasoning. William of Ockham was a medieval English philosopher who is, in some ways, one of the fathers of empiricism. He argued the following principle: if you can explain a phenomenon with three posited entities and someone else requires four to explain the same phenomenon equally consistently and coherently, then the three-part argument is always superior to the four-part. That is Occam's Razor — the principle of eliminating those entities, arguments, or premises that are not absolutely necessary.

Applying Occam's Razor to the phenomenal construction of objects in everyday experience leads to the elimination of matter. We simply say that objects are the conjunction of discrete sensory experiences. If all of our sensible objects do not really need matter to support them — since we posit matter only as something these sense data can hang on, and we have shown that we do not have to do that — then all we have left are ideas. Hence idealism: the only thing we actually experience and need posit are those ideas.

But not quite the only thing. Ideas themselves need a substratum — they must be lodged somewhere. And it is obvious that there is only one place an idea can be lodged: in the human mind. What does that leave us with? We have a universe of ideas in minds. All of the objects of experience in the universe are, therefore, ideas in minds.

Berkeley extended this critique beyond what we might call secondary qualities — those of immediate sense — to primary qualities as well. He was able to demonstrate that shape, motion, and magnitude are also things which are constructed from sense and are therefore not necessarily part of the fabric of the universe prior to our experience of it.

Idealism in Service of Pietism: The Argument for the Existence of God

Let me move on to what I think is probably a more profound and important dimension of Berkeley's thought: how he deploys his idealism to prove his pietistic agenda.

Let us grant that Berkeley has argued for an empiricist absolute idealism. What he wants to prove from that is that such a position entails the existence of God, and that it is God — and not Newtonian mechanics — that accounts for the law-like regularity of our ideas. How does this argument work?

We know that all the objects of the world are ideas in minds. To that we add the following observation Berkeley makes: we have two classes of ideas. First, there are those ideas of which we are aware that we ourselves produce. You look at this lectern, you close your eyes, and you form an image of it in your mind — that idea or image you produce yourself. Looking at that phenomena, one can say minds produce ideas.

But there are other ideas or impressions that you clearly do not create yourself. When you look at this lectern directly and do not merely imagine it, when you see it without any act of the imagination, you are aware that you do not produce this idea. It is produced in your mind by an extraneous agency. But since we have

established that it is minds that produce ideas, there must be a mind producing that idea in your mind. These are what we have traditionally called the ideas of sense.

It is important to note that Berkeley is working from a phenomenological level. The way you distinguish whether you have produced an idea or have not really comes down to whether you feel that you voluntarily produced it. Moreover, you will note that the ideas you produce are never as clear and distinct — to use the Cartesian language — and do not have the same vivacity or richness of detail as those which you do not produce. You can verify this for yourself: look at the lectern, note its details, close your eyes, form the image in your mind, and see whether it is nearly as detailed. You will find that it is not.

So the real distinction between ideas is not merely between those caused by sense and those caused by reflection, but rather between those that are very clear and distinct and those that are not. The conclusion of this argument is that there must exist another mind capable of producing all the ideas we claim to sense — which is to say, all of the sensible world must be produced by a mind that places the ideas of that sensible world into our minds.

And if we think about what such a mind would be — capable of such power and directness — that is precisely what we commonly call God. So Berkeley feels that empiricism, which we saw in Mandeville and others had been used to argue for irreligion, is in fact, if deployed correctly, the basis for an embracing of basic religious truths.

This brings us, of course, to one of the famous quips in the history of Berkeleian idealism: the famous question of whether, if a tree falls in the forest and no person is there to hear it, it makes a sound. Critics had always thought this was a great refutation of Berkeley. If no one

is there to hear it, then there is no idea in a mind, and therefore it does not make a sound — which is absurd, since we naturally expect that when trees fall in forests they will make a sound. But Berkeley actually has, I think, a fairly cogent answer to this. If the tree falls in the forest, it does make a sound — because there is always one mind present to experience it, and that is God. If God were not present, there would indeed be no sound. But neither, for that matter, would there be a tree or a forest.

God sustains the existence of all of these objects. I want to stress this point repeatedly, because traditional Christian teaching — which had been undermined by the Newtonian revolution and the Enlightenment — had been that God not only created the universe (which Newtonians could accept in the manner of a watchmaker), but sustained its being at every moment. Berkeley is attempting to demonstrate that God does indeed sustain the being of the universe by creating the ideas in our minds. In a sense, we could think of God in this context as a kind of universal switchboard of ideas. God is the source of the law-like regularity of our experience. He ensures that when we perceive objects falling, they always accelerate at sea level at thirty-two feet per second squared.

Berkeley's point would be that when you see such law-like regularity, that suggests not materialism or mechanism, but intelligence. What are the odds that the universe would happen to follow the integral calculus and the infinitesimal calculus? That is a clear sign of intelligent design and an intelligent designer — and therefore of God.

Responses to Critics: Johnson and the Problem of Skepticism

This brings us to one of the other classic critiques of Berkeley and idealism, the one raised by Samuel Johnson. When Johnson was presented with the idealist position, he said, "I refute Berkeley thus," and kicked a stone. I hope that by now you have a sense of how Berkeley would have responded to that critique. You have an idea in your mind that there is a rock or a lectern in front of you. You volitionally choose to strike out at that object, and then you feel another sensory impression — that of pain in your toe. Does that prove, however, that there is a physical stone there? Not at all. That proves only the law-like regularity of God's controlling that switchboard of ideas. God, aware that you voluntarily chose to strike out at what you perceived to be an object in front of you, accordingly produced, in accordance with the law-like regularity that God imposes on the universe, the experience of pain in your toe.

Why go through this intense metaphysical exercise? There are a couple of things Berkeley needs to establish. First, he is acutely aware of the great prestige, importance, and achievements of Newtonian physics. To argue against that would be to argue himself into a very lonely position. So Berkeley is trying to produce an idealism that will account for Newtonian physics, but do so in a way that does not undermine deeper religious truths.

Berkeley's point is that Newtonian physics helps us predict experience — it shows us the law-like regularity of our sense impressions — but it does not actually explain anything. And this, I think, is a very deep insight on Berkeley's part. If I inform you that objects accelerate downward at thirty-two feet per second squared at sea level, and that this is because of certain laws of gravity, that does not in fact explain *why* those objects accelerate downward at

thirty-two feet per second squared. It simply gives us the laws which they follow. But why do they follow those laws? Even the physicist, at least at this point, does not have an answer. Are they gravity rays? Are they gravity particles? This was an intense philosophical problem — how does one explain action at a distance? Berkeley's argument is therefore that Newtonian physics does not really explain; it simply allows us to predict future experiences. It is immensely useful, but hardly explanatory. And therefore you cannot build a materialist metaphysic on it.

I point this out because this is not a position that Newton himself would have disagreed with. Newton was used to support materialism and mechanism, but Newton himself was an extremely pious Christian who spent much of the latter part of his life working on alchemy and the Book of Revelation.

The Berkeleian take on physics, then, is that it is of inestimable value in allowing us to predict future experiences on the basis of past ones, yet it is unable to offer us any real causal account of what changes things in the world, and therefore does not really have any metaphysical significance. This is a critical point because, as I stress repeatedly, Newton had been used to support the more secular and materialist worldview of the Enlightenment.

Secondly, there is another reason Berkeley goes through all of these metaphysical gymnastics: he believes that the belief in matter is, in fact, the cause of skepticism. And that skepticism had in fact helped to support, if not atheism, at least agnosticism. If we cannot be certain about the existence of the material world, how can we be certain about the existence of a divine realm?

Why is the belief in matter the cause of skepticism? Because the belief in matter argues that we are separated from the real material world — the world of mass — by a veil of ideas. We have ideas,

representations of objects, but they are not the objects themselves. Those ideas mediate between us and the physical world. And that is exactly where Descartes had raised the problem of skepticism. How can we ever know that the ideas we have of objects correspond to the objects themselves? We saw Galileo and Descartes develop this with respect to the distinction between primary and secondary qualities. We believe we see red in objects. We believe we perceive hardness or smoothness in objects. Yet the physicists and materialists insist that really all that is there is discrete quantities of matter with shapes in motion — that color is not something in the object itself but part of the way our retina reacts to light.

That of course produces the problem of skepticism: how do we know that all the rest of our experiences are not in fact distortions of what matter is really like? But by eliminating matter from the equation, skepticism becomes an impossibility. Since all that exists are ideas, and since we have immediate access to them — unmediated by any veil of representation — we can have absolute certainty about the objects of our knowledge, because they are, in fact, the very ideas that we phenomenally experience in an immediate sense. By eliminating a material world, a world beyond the realm of sense, skepticism becomes a logical impossibility.

Berkeley, perhaps somewhat counterintuitively but at least in his own mind, believed that he was in fact arguing for common sense. He felt that most people, when they thought about objects, actually believed those objects were the sum of their sense experiences, and did not believe that there was some other realm deeper and more profound than those objects — a realm with different, purely mathematical properties. Berkeley therefore saw himself as a champion not only of religious truth, but of common life, common sense, and common judgment.

Berkeley is clear that by producing skepticism, materialism is in fact producing atheism — for materialism posits this unknowable and, as he would argue, occult substratum to cause the experiences and regularities of our lives. By *occult* he means a substratum which is posited to unify our sense experiences but is itself never experienced. This is all the more troubling because these regularities actually issue from the mind of God. There is therefore not only a philosophical error here, but a moral and spiritual error as well. Materialism commits us to endless metaphysical and epistemological wrangling — disputes which we can never resolve, as Descartes himself showed.

What idealism does is restore our commonsense belief that our experience of the actual world is sound, that the world really is the way we experience it, full of colors and textures and odors. And it allows us to get beyond these dry metaphysical disputes and turn to what are the genuinely critical issues. Here I want to cite the concluding passage of Berkeley's famous treatise:

For after all, what deserves the first place in our studies is the consideration of God and our duty; which to promote, as it was the main drift and design of my labors, so shall I esteem them altogether useless and ineffectual, if by what I have said I cannot inspire my readers with a pious sense of the presence of God; and having shown the falseness and vanity of those barren speculations which make the chief employment of learned men, the better to dispose them to reverence and embrace the salutary truths of the gospel, which to know and to practice is the highest perfection of human nature.

Conclusion

We have seen that Berkeley, as a critic of the Enlightenment, criticizes it by adopting its very own phenomenological and empiricist

assumptions. We have seen as well that he is able to use those assumptions to argue against materialism and on behalf of idealism. And finally, we have seen that this allows him to attempt to recover what for him was endangered by the Enlightenment — the deep Christian piety and sense of moral virtue and duty that he regarded as central to the Christian tradition.

In conclusion, I would like to make a claim that I find quite notable. Part of the power of the Enlightenment is that even its most profound critics — those who most clearly reject both its assumptions and its conclusions — find themselves forced to argue against it from within its own dialectical boundaries. With Berkeley, we see that critiquing the Enlightenment means demonstrating logical inconsistencies within the Lockean tradition itself. Similarly, when we turn to Rousseau, we will see that rejecting the Enlightenment for him means arguing from within the social contractarian positions established by Hobbes and Locke.

It is also worth noting that if the Enlightenment produced reactions that led to such great intellectual fruits as idealism — a doctrine of immense importance in the nineteenth century — that is all the more reason to appreciate its critical and generative role in the history of Western thought.

Lecture 44: Hume's Epistemology

Professor Darren Stalloff

Introduction

In our last lecture, we looked at Berkeley's use of empiricism to argue for an idealist metaphysic. In this lecture, we look at the master of eighteenth-century empiricism — really the dominant figure in that tradition — and that is David Hume, one of the most important and, in many ways, one of the more attractive figures in the Western philosophical tradition. He was, in fact, a man of great wit, affability, and charm, who was a very popular figure both in Parisian salon society as well as in his native Edinburgh. But with respect to his philosophical musings during his life — particularly the texts we are going to be looking at in our series, *An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, and then in the subsequent lectures — he was actually fairly obscure during his own lifetime.

The reason, as we will see, is that his arguments were not only rather dry and technical, but also led to extremely skeptical conclusions. In his own lifetime, he was a famous writer, though not actually as a philosopher. He was better known for his moral and political essays, and especially his multi-volume *History of England*, which was probably the great classic of its time.

But it is in his philosophical work on empiricism that Hume brings the tradition that Locke had begun and Berkeley had moved forward to its real logical conclusion and fulfillment. *An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding* really represents the culmination of the eighteenth-century empiricist speculative project.

What we are going to look for in Hume, then, is two things. First, how does he deploy empiricism differently than Locke and Berkeley?

In particular, how does he use it to support what we will see are extremely skeptical conclusions? Here we will look at his basic analysis of sense data, his understanding of the relations between ideas and matters of fact, and his analysis of how we explain our knowledge of cause and effect in the world.

We will then turn to what I think is the second important issue that Hume addresses. Given this sort of skeptical analysis, what are the implications for traditional metaphysics? We will see that what Hume in fact does is dissolve metaphysical disputes, rendering traditional metaphysical notions into what he considers dogmas. Here we will look at his reduction of the question of power, force, and necessary connection; his discussion of the question of freedom and determinacy; and finally, his critique of miracles, prophecy, and revealed religion.

Finally, we will take a look at what for Hume are the practical implications of his skeptical reasoning.

The Analysis of Experience on Empiricist Grounds

Let us begin with his analysis of experience on empiricist grounds. Like all empiricists, Hume recognized that all of our mental representations or ideas — the images between our ears, as it were, the phenomenal stuff of which our experience is made — can be divided into two classes, which are traditionally referred to as impressions, on the one hand, and ideas on the other.

Impressions, which we presume are the result of sense data, are — and here he follows Berkeley — really distinguished from ideas by their relative phenomenal vivacity or force. By this I mean that when we claim to have a sense experience of something, which produces an idea in our minds, it is always much more detailed, powerful, clear, and distinct than the reflection or recollection of that image which

we can later recall to our minds. So the first class of phenomena are impressions, and the second are ideas — what Hume sometimes calls thoughts — which again are distinguished by their lack of force and internal clarity. We presume that these ideas are in fact copies of impressions, and one of the reasons we presume this is because they generally succeed them. Following Locke's conception of the *tabula rasa*, we in fact do not have an idea of a horse until we have actually seen a horse and have had impressions of it. And it is that temporal sequence that will tend, at least in Hume's mind, to lead us to argue for cause and effect.

I want to stress this because Hume is going to make all of his arguments based on introspection and scientific observation of his own experience. Hume is very much a child of the Enlightenment. He exemplifies its project of the creation of a scientific culture. Indeed, Hume endeavored to be what he called the Newton of the moral sciences — to create a purely scientific philosophy and, as we will see in subsequent lectures, a moral theory as well, one based entirely on observations.

On the basis of such introspection and scientific observation, Hume claims that there are in fact only three principles by which the mind associates its various ideas. These are resemblance, spatiotemporal contiguity, and cause and effect.

You have an image of me as you look at me. You close your eyes and try to recreate that image in your mind. Presumably, that image resembles the first. Hence, we have resemblance. Second is spatiotemporal contiguity. You see me at a certain position on the podium at this moment. I move two steps to the right. You then see me in another position, and you note that I have filled up the spaces in between — both in space and in time. That is presumably one of the sources by which you see an identity between all of the experiences you have as I move two steps to the right.

Spatiotemporal contiguity creates that sense of identity — that relation between those various experiences you had of me just a few seconds ago. And finally, cause and effect: if I release an object and it falls downward, you tend to assume that its falling was caused by my releasing it. So that also relates ideas. Again: resemblance, spatiotemporal contiguity, and cause and effect.

Relations of Ideas and Matters of Fact

All of our knowledge can therefore be broken into one of two classes. The first class deals solely with the relations between ideas. What Hume means by this is intuitively certain knowledge — the sort of thing we find in pure logic and in mathematics. Such knowledge is always either intuitively certain or capable of logical proof or demonstration. For instance, if I tell you that the shortest distance between two points is a straight line, I can offer no demonstration for it. But it is an intuitively certain axiom which you will usually accept. Or, once you are intuitively aware that the shortest distance between two points is a straight line, you can recursively build upon that to derive, perhaps, the Pythagorean theorem.

Both of these are logical and necessary — one based on intuition, the other built up from intuition through demonstration. The obvious examples are mathematics and logic. I stress this because it is critical for Hume, and as we will see for subsequent logical positivist philosophers, that such propositions have no existential implication. Whether there really exist such things as points and straight lines will not change the truth value of the claim that the shortest distance between two points is a straight line. Similarly, if I give you a logical truth — either it is raining or it is not raining — that is certainly true based on the way we understand the word *or*. It exhausts all the possibilities. But it does not actually tell you any factual knowledge

about the world. It simply tells you about, as it were, the relations between concepts or ideas.

It is the second class of knowledge which is going to be far more important, and that is knowledge which deals with matters of fact — those that do have existential implications about the nature of existence. Now, obviously, this knowledge has no logical basis, and that is for the simple reason that we can always imagine counterfactuals. Were I to release this pen, it would fall downward. That is a matter-of-fact piece of knowledge. But it is logically possible that it could either hover in the air or float upward. It never has, but it is logically possible. We therefore cannot say that this pen's falling downward when released is based on any sort of logical knowledge. It is, in fact, purely based on our experience.

So the critical epistemological question is: how can we know matters of fact other than what we are immediately experiencing? That of which you are directly aware is not a problem. But how do you know anything else? It turns out the answer is the principle of cause and effect, because it is cause and effect that allows us to infer from seen to unseen phenomena. You come back in fifteen minutes and find that this lectern is three feet to the right. You can therefore deduce that someone must have come in and moved it. That is the notion of cause and effect — it allows you to infer the unseen phenomenon that someone came into the room.

The Problem of Cause and Effect

Now, how do we know about cause and effect? It is certainly not known *a priori* or before experience. It is not known by logical analysis. We know this because all of our cause-and-effect relations are in fact ones where we can imagine them working out differently — we mentioned that counterfactuals are always logically possible.

So our knowledge of cause and effect must come from our experience of constant conjunctions. This pen will fall downward when I release it because every time you have seen an object released, it has fallen downward.

This is important for Hume because what it means is that all of our knowledge of matters of fact — the most refined form of which is science — is ultimately based only on experience, and therefore never gives us absolute knowledge. It never gives us ultimate answers. It only pushes back the envelope of our ignorance. As Hume puts it, and I want to quote:

Elasticity, gravity, cohesion of parts, communication of motion by impulse — these are probably the ultimate causes and principles which we shall ever discover in nature. And we may esteem ourselves sufficiently happy if, by accurate inquiry and reasoning, we can trace up the particular phenomena to, or near to, these general principles. But the most perfect philosophy of the natural kind only staves off our ignorance a little longer.

Objects accelerate downward because of the laws of gravity. What causes the laws of gravity? We do not know. And Hume takes this a step further, arguing that perhaps the most perfect philosophy of the moral or metaphysical kind serves only to discover larger portions of our ignorance — the next great issues that remain to be explored.

Custom, Habit, and the Limits of Reason

So what have we established so far? That all of our knowledge of matters of fact is based on cause and effect, and cause and effect is in turn based on our experience of constant conjunctions. The next question becomes: what warrants our belief in experience? What makes us believe that the future will resemble the past?

One could imagine that in ten minutes the laws of gravity will change dramatically, and henceforth objects will accelerate upward. Or one could imagine that divine providence exists and that God really did create the world with the earth at its center, as the biblical account held before Copernicus. Given that these are logical possibilities, how can we warrant our belief in experience?

We cannot do it on the basis of reason, for as I have mentioned, it is logically possible that the future will not resemble the present — that in five minutes, pens will start floating upward. The same is true of the past. Nor can we appeal to causality to warrant the belief in experience, because causality itself depends on experience. It would be circular to invoke cause and effect in order to explain experience. And obviously experience cannot teach us that the future will resemble the past, because all arguments based on experience already presuppose exactly that.

So how do we arrive at our knowledge of experience, which allows us to know something about the world? This is where Hume achieves his profound skeptical result. The answer is essentially psychological disposition and instinct. He uses the words *custom* or *habit*. It is not, in fact, rationally provable that the future will resemble the past. But it is customary. It is natural. And in practical life, it is inescapable — it would be perverse to try to live as if you expected objects to move upward tomorrow. Experience is, in this sense, warranted by a sort of natural instinct, not a rational proof. And I would like to quote Hume:

Wherever the repetition of any particular act or operation produces a propensity to renew the same act or operation without being impelled by any reasoning or process of the understanding, we always say that this propensity is the effect of custom. All inferences from experience, therefore, are effects of custom, not of reasoning. Custom, then, is the great guide of human life. It is that principle alone which renders our

experience useful to us and makes us expect for the future a similar train of events with those which have appeared in the past.

Hume offers some good empirical grounds to believe that it must be custom and not reasoning that warrants our belief in experience. Take the case of small children, all of whom act on the basis of experience in a stimulus-and-response way, but none of whom are capable of abstract reasoning. They could not have arrived at a rational proof for warranting their experience, yet they do trust their experiences. That is a sign that there is some sort of natural instinct in us that propels us to accept experience. Similarly, we can think of adults who are incapable of abstract demonstrations yet nonetheless always act on the basis of their experience — as do various animals, which are teachable and trainable. Dogs certainly are, yet no one would expect them to be capable of abstract reasoning. We therefore know there must be some sort of instinctual disposition or custom which leads us to have such belief.

This is an extremely skeptical position. It ultimately says that our knowledge is based on a sort of instinct, and that instinct is not much of a rational foundation at all.

The Dissolution of Metaphysical Doctrines

Power, Force, and Necessary Connection

Let me turn to the second major issue. What does Hume do with this skepticism? We will see that he deploys it to undermine most of the central metaphysical doctrines of the eighteenth century.

If all of our knowledge of matters of fact is based on cause and effect, which is in turn based on experience, where do we derive our metaphysical doctrines of power, force, and necessary connection — the notion that there is some basic power that causes one billiard ball to communicate motion to another when struck? Well, obviously

there is no logical basis for necessary connection in the world, because logical proofs, as we have noted, have no existential implications. We can always imagine counterfactuals: one billiard ball strikes another and both stop moving. There is no logical necessity there. So neither necessary connection, force, nor power arises from the structure of logic or reason alone.

And you can think of this in a very straightforward way. You cannot imagine the color of a necessary connection, the odor of a power, or the flavor of a force. What we might feel to be direct experiences of force — for example, the power to lift your arm when you choose — are also, Hume argues, based on experience. We can observe this with a man stricken with palsy, who will attempt to lift his arm in vain, or with someone who has recently been amputated and still feels sensation in a limb that is no longer there. In these cases, the supposed necessary connection or force simply disappears. So our belief in necessary connection is nothing more than a very powerful psychological condition. Certain conjunctions are so constant — we are so used to finding one billiard ball strike another and the other one move — that we tend to assume there is something universal and necessary about this. But there is no logical basis for that assumption. It is entirely a psychological reality, not a logical one.

Liberty and Necessity

Let me turn to the second metaphysical issue Hume critiques: the notion of liberty and necessity, one of the great philosophical debates of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Is the world a mechanistic, material realm of phenomena in which everything is part of a causal nexus? Or are humans free agents possessed of will and choice?

Hume takes a somewhat provocative approach here, arguing that the only real difference between the two positions is one of verbal dispute — that practically everyone has always agreed about the real

meaning of liberty and the real nature of necessity. Let us start with necessity. Necessity and causation, which are the very essence of determinism, are simply the result of our experience of constant conjunctions and our expectation, based on custom, that the future will resemble the past. There is therefore no logical proof for determinism. It is simply a psychological disposition.

Liberty, by way of contrast, is merely the absence of external restraint. It has nothing to do with some abstruse doctrine of a free or uncaused will. In fact, it is perfectly consistent with a causally determined universe. And here Hume is speaking in a very commonsensical way about what English-speaking people mean by the word *liberty* — simply the absence of external constraint, whether by an individual, an institution, or the state. That is, in fact, the kind of liberty we find in our own Bill of Rights, and it has nothing to do with the causal structure of the universe.

But Hume wants to make a stronger argument. He wants to show that the view that our wills are somehow uncaused is in fact philosophically and practically untenable. His argument is this: if we genuinely did have a free will, that would mean our choices and actions would not be the result of any causal law or principle. But if that were true, Hume argues, there would be no rational basis for punishment. If I were to pull out a pistol and shoot one of you, and you all believed in free will, there would be nothing within me that had caused that violent outburst — except perhaps some fleeting idea I had that it was the right thing to do. Why punish me then? Why not simply explain to me that it is inappropriate to shoot people? Since there would be no causal determinacy leading me to shoot people, punishing me would be a mere act of vengeance. You could simply release me and I would pose no further threat.

Hume is pointing out that in our legal experience, our criminal experience, and our practical life, we all assume that our actions are

caused — and caused by our characters. Were I to pull out a gun and shoot one of you, you would be wise to punish me and arrest me precisely because that act is probably the result of some character trait I possess — perhaps a violent, homicidal disposition — that I would be likely to act on again in similar circumstances. Indeed, if you think of practical life, it is always based on the expectation that people's behaviors reflect their characters and that you can in fact predict them. We always know that if we say certain things to close friends or family members, we can expect certain kinds of reactions. So again, that entire metaphysical dispute has been dissolved. There is no logical basis for determinism, and the notion of an uncaused free will is itself incoherent.

Miracles and Revealed Religion

I want now to turn to the third issue Hume attacks, and perhaps the most controversial of all: his doctrine of miracles. We saw before that Locke had critiqued the notion of immediate revelations. Hume goes a step further and wants to critique the biblical revelations found in the Christian tradition. We will see that Hume is, in fact, a thorough agnostic.

What is a miracle? Miracles are, by definition, violations of the laws of nature. The water turns to blood, manna rains from heaven, the Red Sea is parted. What makes them miraculous is precisely that they violate our constant experience — we never see manna fall from heaven, we never see the Red Sea parted, and we never see water turned into wine. But those laws of nature are in fact the result of the accumulated sum of human knowledge and experience. So clearly there can be no rational grounds to believe in miracles.

And here Hume turns his skepticism in a distinctly irreligious direction. He adduces several arguments for the position that there are no rational grounds for belief in miracles, pointing out, for instance, where we find miracles recorded. We find them in the Old

Testament when the Hebrews are a relatively primitive, nomadic people. Once they settle and become a sophisticated agricultural society, miracles cease. We find miracles in Mexico — Our Lady of Guadalupe — but we never find them in Manhattan. We rarely experience weeping statues of the Virgin in the middle of Washington, D.C. This, for Hume, suggests that miracles are largely a product of primitive credulity.

But Hume then turns this into what I would argue is a wonderfully delicious and ironic turn against Christian belief. His refutation of miracles to demonstrate their irrationality shows, he argues, that Christianity itself cannot be rationally defended. And I quote:

I am the better pleased with the method of reasoning here delivered, as I think it may serve to confound those dangerous friends or disguised enemies to the Christian religion who have undertaken to defend it by the principles of human reason. Our most holy religion is founded on faith, not on reason. And it is a sure method of exposing it to put it to such a trial as it is by no means fitted to endure.

And from the end of the same passage, perhaps the most ironic lines of all:

We may conclude that the Christian religion not only was at first attended with miracles, but even at this day cannot be believed by any reasonable person without one. Mere reason is insufficient to convince us of its veracity, and whoever is moved by faith to assent to it is conscious of a continued miracle in his own person, which subverts all the principles of his understanding and gives him a determination to believe what is most contrary to custom and experience.

What makes that such a powerfully ironic statement is that it can in fact be read in two ways. You could read it as an orthodox Calvinist statement — that religion does violate the rules of reason, and that this proves the truth of religion precisely because of the mystery of

divine grace, which instills the habit of faith within us. Hume was, after all, of a Scottish — that is, Calvinist — background. But you could also read it, as I think Hume himself probably intended, as derisive and deeply insulting toward religion, essentially arguing that the fundamental miracle is that anyone with a reasonable education could believe such things. And that is very much at the essence of what Enlightenment esotericism was all about.

Skepticism and Its Practical Limits

So what has Hume shown us? If we choose to adopt the Cartesian posture of systematic doubt, there is no resolution for it outside of adducing principles like custom or habit, which have no rational basis. If you doubt the truth of your faculties — that they are accurately representing sense experience — it is impossible to prove that they do reflect the world, that there is a world out there beyond your experiences. If you choose to embrace the Cartesian position, you cannot in fact escape solipsism.

How, then, do we get beyond skepticism? This is where Hume becomes the great liberating theorist. Skepticism is refuted only by practical life. There is no philosophical refutation for it. And that is because in practical life there is no possible reason one would embrace extreme skepticism. What is the point? Does the fact that you doubt the existence of the external world mean you are no longer going to eat? No longer going to dress yourself? There is no practical reason whatsoever to embrace such a doctrine.

In that sense, all of the skepticism Hume himself has expressed amounts to a sort of elaborate metaphysical joke — but it does have a moral point. Moderate skepticism, not the extreme Pyrrhonian variety, but moderate skepticism, does have a practical value. It teaches us how uncertain our most basic views are. It teaches us to

avoid the dogmatism of rationalistic philosophy, and also what Hume equally saw as problematic: the intolerance of learned Christian orthodoxy.

It is that spirit of free inquiry and trust in common sense which lay at the very heart of the Enlightenment, and which has made David Hume one of its most important and enduring representatives.

Lecture 45: Hume's Theory of Morality

Professor Darren Stalloff

Introduction

In our last lecture, we looked at Hume's deployment of the empiricist epistemology and phenomenology to produce what were ultimately skeptical conclusions, which tended to undermine much of the traditional basis of traditional philosophy. In this lecture, we turn to Hume's musings on the question of morality. We will see that in many ways Hume's moral theory — at least as contained in the text we are going to examine, *An Inquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* — really represents a sort of transition point in the history of Anglo-American moral philosophy.

On the one hand, it connects to the moral sense doctrines associated with the Scottish Enlightenment and the Scottish school of common sense — figures like James Beattie and Thomas Reid, coming out of the tradition of Francis Hutcheson, and even, to some extent, Hume's close friend Adam Smith. That is, in part, where he is starting from. But he also leads toward the dominant moral conception of nineteenth-century Anglo-American thought: utilitarianism. Both John Stuart Mill and particularly Jeremy Bentham drew their inspiration for the construction of utilitarianism directly from David Hume.

What I want to do in this lecture is look at three different issues. First, I want to lay out what approach Hume is taking to the problem of morality. We will see that he is taking a scientific approach — as I have mentioned before, he thinks of himself as the Newton of the moral sciences — so we will need to examine how he frames the problem of moral philosophy scientifically. Then we will turn to what

his scientific answer actually is: what is the principle that unifies our experiences of moral judgment? That will turn out to be utility, the very issue that will be central to nineteenth-century moral thought. And then, finally, I want to look at what, for Hume, is the cause of our approbation or approval of utility, which will turn out to be a sentimental or instinctual disposition toward approval.

Hume's Scientific Approach to Morality

Let us start with that first project. How do we understand Hume's analysis of the question of morality? This is important because Hume does not, in fact, offer a prescriptive theory of morals. He does not offer us a set of duties we ought to follow, a set of injunctions — what we might call a prescriptive code of ethical conduct, with duties and maxims. Instead, he offers a scientific theory of morality, a theory about how morality ever came about. Hume treats morality as an already existent realm of human judgment, one that does not need a philosophical foundation, and instead asks: how do we ever come to make moral judgments? What causes us to call this good and that bad, this virtuous and that vicious?

In some ways, we will see this is a very similar project to what Nietzsche undertakes later in the *Genealogy of Morals*. He is looking for a natural history of morality. But in Hume's case, he is primarily interested in describing the cause of moral evaluation among a particular species — Homo sapiens — and showing just in what such judgments consist, rather than, as I have mentioned before, prescribing a foundational moral theory of the kind we find in Kant or others.

We will find that Hume argues our moral judgments really find their origin in sentiment — a sentiment of approbation, which is, for Hume, a passion. Hume had argued, in fact, that reason is and ought

to be the slave of the passions; that is, the passions ultimately determine our actions and behavior. But what distinguishes our moral passions from our others is that they are calm. They are relatively rational passions. In the case of right action, we feel a calm sentiment of approval when we see it. When we see something vicious, we feel a calm sentiment of disapproval. We see someone giving charity to a homeless person, and we feel not a violent passion but a calm sense of approval for that act. We see someone else stealing from a charity collection, and we feel, again, not a violent passion but a calm passion of disapproval.

This is critical because prior to Hume, most ethical theorists had argued that moral doctrines were based on abstract reasoning or rational deliberation. Hume is going to argue, again just as he had in his epistemology, for the importance of passion and instinct in forming the most important parts of our lives, both private and public.

Sentiment as the Basis of Moral Judgment

So how is he going to establish this claim? He notes, again on the basis of observation, that all of our moral judgments are constantly conjoined with that sentiment of approbation or approval — that we never judge something right or wrong without feeling that response. And we know from the previous lecture that such constant conjunctions are always the sign of causality. That gives him reason to believe that it is in fact our experience of a sentiment of approval or disapproval that actually causes us to judge something right or wrong, virtuous or vicious.

And Hume has some very powerful arguments to suggest that it could not be rational deliberation that forms the basis of our moral judgments. Take the same cases we looked at in the last lecture.

Children are capable of knowing that sharing is right and selfishness is wrong, yet one could not ask such a child to produce the moral deliberation that justifies such a view. They simply know it — they have been trained to know it, but they feel it rather than deliberate about it. Similarly, consider people incapable of rational demonstration, who nonetheless know the distinction between right and wrong.

There is an even sharper point that Hume is making here, one that I think is very critical and characteristically deflationary. He is also stating that if it is not reason that supports our moral judgments, then there is no reason to assume that those who are more rational are more virtuous. Put a moral case to a plowman and a professor, and the former may do every bit as well as the latter. Thomas Jefferson would later cite this doctrine. And indeed, if we think about it practically, we know that there are no small number of people whose intellects are not particularly profound but who have nonetheless engaged in morally virtuous and perhaps even heroic action.

At the same time, we can also note no shortage of remarkable geniuses who achieved great evil in the world. One thinks of a Stalin or a Hitler, but one might also think of a Julius Caesar or any other tyrant who possessed remarkable abilities and incredible intellectual insight but was nonetheless not particularly virtuous. For all of those reasons, we must reject the traditional view that morality is based on rational deliberation.

Utility as the Unifying Principle

Given that the cause of our moral judgments is a sentiment of approval or disapproval depending on the case, the critical question for Hume is: what makes us approve of some actions and disapprove

of others? Why do we say some things are good and some things are bad? Why are the sentiments of approbation excited by some acts and their inverse feelings excited by others?

Hume attempts to answer this question, again, scientifically and empirically. He does so by examining various virtues that are universally acknowledged — certain sorts of moral rectitude that everyone agrees upon — and searching for the common element that might prompt our instinctual or sentimental approbation. That common element turns out to be utility.

Let us start with the virtue of benevolence. Everyone agrees that benevolence is a virtue. It turns out that its most distinctive characteristic is that it tends to promote the public good — utility, or usefulness for the largest number. What causes us to respond to acts of benevolence with the sentiment of approval is the perception that such acts conduce to the utility of the community. We see someone give alms to a homeless person. We say that is not only good for the homeless person, that is good for society in general, and therefore we approve. We see someone else undermining electoral procedures. We say that is not only bad for the person who will lose office, that is bad for society as a whole. We see that inutility, and we feel a sentiment of disapproval.

This is critical for Hume, because for him the only basis of our sentimental approval of the virtue of benevolence is its utility. If being benevolent would prove to be harmful for society, we would disapprove of it. And we can think of such cases — if you give money to an alcoholic so that they can buy more alcohol, that is not actually useful for society, and in that case we do not approve of the act.

Justice and Utility

Now let us turn to the next moral virtue: justice. Hume wants to argue that the only basis of our sentimental approval of the virtue of justice is its obvious utility for society, particularly in two respects — mediating property disputes and enforcing public safety.

He is going to establish this by looking at counterexamples, situations where changing social circumstances might render justice no longer useful, and therefore no longer a virtue. Consider first a society of superabundance, where there is more than enough of everything for everyone — an almost Edenic state. In such a case, would there be any need for justice, particularly with regard to property? If you were to take my watch, and there were no shortage of watches, why would I demand that it be returned to me when I can just as easily take another one that is just as good? Indeed, I would more likely than not welcome you to take it. In such a case, justice serves no purpose, has no utility, and therefore ceases to be a virtue. This may sound far-fetched, but if you think about the account of Genesis and the state of Eden, it was precisely such a place — one where justice did not exist because there was such superabundance that God did not need to reveal the moral law of the Decalogue.

Take another case. Imagine a society of entirely selfless persons — true humanistic saints, where everyone cared for others as much as for themselves. Then again, there would be no need for justice. If you needed my money and I cared for you every bit as much as for myself, you would not have to steal it — I would be happy to give it to you, and in fact would insist that you take it. In such a situation, the distinction between mine and thine ceases to make sense. This may sound far-fetched, but there does in fact exist such a situation: consider the normal human nuclear family, which is, within that context, relatively selfless. The father acts for the good of the wife

and children, the wife acts for the good of the husband and children, and the children look to the well-being of their siblings and parents. In such a situation, arrangements are based exclusively on mutual affection and regard, and it is precisely then that procedural rules of justice are out of place. There is no mine and thine within the family — it is a unit based on mutual love and support, on mutual selflessness. And for that reason, we do not have precise legal codes about who receives how much allowance and exactly when various chores must be done about the house. Justice is not necessary in that context, and therefore we do not treat it as a virtue there.

Let us take some inverse cases. Suppose a society of extreme scarcity, where no matter how hard you worked and no matter how frugal you were, you could never procure the means of livelihood, so that none of the normal procedures for supplying yourself and your family with the necessaries of life would ever work. In such a case, Hume argues, justice again would be useless — it would not promote the good for the greatest number, and therefore we would expect its operation to be suspended. And indeed, if we imagine cases of atrocious famines, we would expect that people would cease to respect property rights. That was not uncommon in eighteenth-century Western Europe. When bread prices reached a point at which working people could no longer afford them, what traditionally followed were bread riots, where peasants or workers would seize the bread, leave what they thought was an appropriate payment for it, and generally the authorities would not try to punish those who did so — because they understood that in certain contexts that was partly a way of relieving social pressure, and also that justice had not served the public interest in that case. And therefore, the rules of justice were suspended.

Let me give you another case. Suppose you were among a society of rogues and thieves who kept no honor, who could be expected to

keep no promises, and who were truly cutthroats. Would justice have utility in such a case? That is, in fact, the case Hobbes described in the state of nature, in which justice does not obtain. The first law of nature, according to Hobbes — to summarize it loosely — is that you should do unto others and then depart quickly. It is precisely because in that context justice has no utility, it does not serve the interests of society as a whole, that it is ignored and abjured.

So why do we find justice to be a virtue? Precisely because for us justice is a middle point between all of these extremes. Justice is useful for the well-being of our society precisely because we are in a situation where frugality and industry can help us secure the means of everyday life, where people are neither completely rogues nor completely selfless. Hence the utility of justice, and hence our approbation of it.

Justice, Power, and Moral Progress

One way of clarifying this point is to consider a thought experiment Hume raises. Imagine that we were to come into contact with creatures every bit as rational as us but entirely weak and unable to resist our force. Suppose, to make the hypothetical vivid, that the Mars lander had malfunctioned because there are, in fact, Martians — exactly one inch tall, with no military technology but with considerable scientific and medical knowledge. After the failure of the lander, they come and visit us. Would we treat them justly? Remember, they are defenseless; we could expropriate anything we wished from them.

Hume argues that, in fact, we would not. Because justice would not be useful for us in that case, we would not act justly towards them. This may sound like a harsh doctrine, and it is — Hume is fully aware of that. But Hume wants to substantiate it by raising critical problems

about eighteenth-century practice, because eighteenth-century Englishmen were in fact faced with just such a case — not one-inch Martians, but Amerindian populations in North America. Relative to English settlers, they were relatively powerless. And Hume points out, empirically, how such people were actually treated: with exploitation and genocide. We did not treat them justly precisely because it was not useful for us to do so.

Another case in eighteenth-century society, one that Hume is also very sensitive to, is the status of women. Women in eighteenth-century society were clearly second-class citizens. They could not sue or be sued in courts. They had no right to private property once married. They were subject to a legal doctrine called coverture, by which their legal personalities were effectively erased and they were placed under the guardianship of their husbands — which is why they took their husbands' last names. Hume says: here we have beings that are every bit as sentient as us — and Hume is a great defender of the rationality and accomplishments of women when properly trained and educated — and yet, because they are physically weaker, most Englishmen feel no qualms about exploiting them and keeping them in a powerless situation dominated by men. And why? Because men see no utility in extending justice toward women, and therefore do not feel that sentiment of approval toward doing so.

That, of course, argues for a very limited sense of our moral awareness and understanding. So where do we get moral progress? How do we learn to treat Amerindians and women better? The key is moral education. Moral education consists in learning to think about others as ourselves — learning to regard them not as different, but as similar. That allows us to expand our moral sentiments over a larger community. Once we stop thinking of women as some inferior and second-class form of humanity, but instead as human beings

who simply have a different reproductive role, we must extend justice toward them. In the case of Indigenous peoples, it means recognizing that they are, in fact, Homo sapiens sapiens — potentially rational beings who should be members of our society and deserve the protection of our justice.

The Political Virtues

Let us turn to another case: the political virtues — those associated with government and political society. Again, Hume wants to argue that those institutions have their sole basis in utility. Imagine a society where people were naturally just and naturally followed the rules of justice with regard to property and personal safety. In such a situation, he argues, there would be no government, because it would not be useful. Such an Edenic situation would in fact be a kind of paradisal anarchy.

Take another case: the so-called laws of nations that emerge between countries. Hume argues that they only arise after economic intercourse — after the rise of commerce between those nations. It is only once they trade with each other that they have a motive to be just to one another, because it is only then that it is useful to both parties to behave justly. This is important for Hume because he then says that if such countries were to go to war, we would expect them to suspend the laws of nations. Why? Not because they have become amoral, but because those laws are no longer useful to them, and therefore no longer excite that sentiment of approbation. And that is, in fact, the case. During the great Anglo-French wars following the French Revolution, both sides violated the rights of neutral shipping precisely because during that state of war those laws were not useful to them. The same thing recurred during the First and Second World Wars: principles that people had acknowledged during peacetime —

the right of neutral shipping and free trade on the open seas — once no longer useful during wartime, became suspended.

Why Utility Excites Approbation

Now we turn to our last question: why does utility excite our sentiment of approval? For Hume, it is an inherent psychological or instinctual disposition on our part. Utility and virtuous action have, for Hume, a natural beauty that moves us like a calm passion. We see someone engage in a virtuous act, we instinctually recognize that it conduces to the utility of the many, and that produces in us a sort of aesthetic experience which is pleasurable.

This is critical for Hume, because the aestheticization of ethics results in the doctrine that moral behavior is a pleasurable part of the cultivated and good life, and that virtue is, in fact, its own reward. As he states:

What philosophical truths can be more advantageous to society than those here delivered, which represent virtue in all her genuine and most engaging charms and make us approach her with ease, familiarity, and affection?

There is a deep point Hume is making here. In traditional moral philosophy, virtue had been about self-sacrifice. It had been about overcoming one's nature and acting in opposition to it — a demand for a certain sort of moral stoicism. Virtue was, therefore, a sort of unpleasant task that one had to perform in order to fulfill one's duty. We will see that very doctrine replicated in Kant. But Hume is a secular child of the Enlightenment who wants to argue, as all Enlightenment figures do, that at some level pleasure is the key to the good life. Utilitarianism is, after all, a sort of social Epicureanism — the most pleasure for the most people. Once we see morality as a result not of duty or the sacrifice of self-interest to the larger good,

but instead as the cultivation of a sort of natural beauty, it ceases to be a painful task and becomes a pleasurable one. As he writes:

The dismal dress falls off, with which many divines and some philosophers have covered her, and nothing appears but gentleness, humanity, beneficence, affability — nay, even at proper intervals, play, frolic, and gaiety. She talks not of useless austerities and rigors, suffering and self-denial. She declares that her sole purpose is to make her votaries and all mankind during every instant of their existence, if possible, cheerful and happy. Nor does she ever willingly part with any pleasure but in hopes of ample compensation in some other period of their lives. The sole trouble which she demands is that of just calculation — learn what really does conduce to the utility, to the pleasure of the greatest number. And if any austere pretenders approach her, enemies to joy and pleasure, she either rejects them as hypocrites and deceivers, or if she admits them in her train, they are ranked, however, among the least favored of her votaries.

So virtue is not the result of narrow self-interest associated with egoism, nor of the self-sacrifice associated with duty. It is in fact the result of a well-rounded and pleasant life — of a fully cultivated life.

Fiction and Moral Education

This brings us to the final point I think we need to examine. In a certain sense, philosophy began with Plato's attempt to rescue morality from the hands of the poets. Plato and Socrates were reacting against the moral codes one found in Homer and the other great epic poets, arguing that only philosophy could produce a truly coherent and acceptable model of morality and that the poets would always lead us astray. Hume is, in a sense, bringing that tradition to a close and inverting it.

By stating that moral progress consists in learning to identify with others and include them within our moral community, Hume raises a critical question: how are we to accomplish that in practice? How are we to learn to identify with others? And Hume has no hesitation in specifying the source of that moral education. It is not to be found in philosophy books. It is not to be found in works of theology or scholastic metaphysics. It is to be found in fiction, in poetry. It is fiction which allows us to enter into the imagination of others.

How do we learn to think of women as members of our community deserving of the protection of our justice? We read novels in which women are the first-person narrator, and we learn to identify with them — to learn that their experiences are not so profoundly different from ours, that their minds are not so profoundly different from ours. We do not learn to treat Amerindians correctly by reading Kant. We learn to treat them correctly by reading James Fenimore Cooper. Or, in our own time, perhaps by watching films like *Black Robe* or *Dances with Wolves*. Similarly, in the context of the nineteenth-century critique of slavery and racism in American life, Hume would argue that the change came less from abstract philosophical principle than from literature. The real figures at the forefront of changing our moral sensibility were writers like Harriet Beecher Stowe — through *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, we learned to think of a slave as, in fact, a Christ-like figure, someone who possessed the same range of emotional needs, propensities, and dispositions as ourselves.

It strikes me that this is a profoundly secularizing and modernizing dimension of the Enlightenment project. And such an education is, if nothing else, pleasant — it is enjoyable. That is part of the charm of Hume: that living the good life and even learning to be a good person is always a pleasant and pleasurable experience. It is the result not so much of a stoic stance of duty, but of polite refinement.

And that, I would argue, is one of the central themes of the Enlightenment that David Hume best exemplifies.

Lecture 46: Hume's Natural Religion

Professor Alan Kors

Introduction

We turn now to David Hume and natural religion. We have talked many times, in discussing the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, about the growing belief and confidence in the culture that one could see through nature to nature's God — that one could learn about the wisdom, providence, and designs of God through the study of nature. The first half of the eighteenth century is marked by a dramatic growth in an optimistic natural philosophy and a belief that one could derive from nature a natural religion that would satisfy human knowledge and intellectual curiosity in an optimistic fashion, reassuring us about the human relationship to God.

The foundation of eighteenth-century optimistic natural philosophy and natural theology derived from two confident conclusions inherited from the intellectual revolution of the seventeenth century. First, the belief that the natural faculties, through the medium of nature, linked human beings to natural truth and to knowledge of God — that we could see through nature to nature's author and his designs, and know with confidence that we lived in a wisely and lovingly designed universe. And second, the belief that that nature and human beings interacted to the benefit of mankind through the providential designs of God.

There are several challenges to such a belief, including the rise of evangelical Christianity in the eighteenth century, which sought to de-emphasize learning about God through nature and to re-emphasize scripture. But the ascent of natural religion throughout the first half of the eighteenth century is a constant. Its most

profound critic is David Hume, the Scottish philosopher, and Hume's critique of natural religion is one of the most important and influential voices of the entire eighteenth century.

The Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion

Hume's most revealing and pointed work on natural religion and natural optimism was his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* — a work that was unpublished until his death but widely known and discussed among his friends and in the salons of Europe. In theory, because it was written as a dialogue among competing viewpoints, it committed David Hume to no particular point of view. It was a set of competing analyses of natural theology, and Hume, at the urging of his friends, gave it a relatively safe ending — a final chapter tacked on that his friends said was necessary to preserve his reputation, and which appeared to take back what the work had in fact established in the minds of its readers.

In its pages, however, the voice of skeptical philosophy — whose name in the dialogues is Philo — is able to challenge the fundamental premise of natural religion: that by inference from the phenomena of nature, we are obliged to infer a cause analogous to a human mind; that looking at the order and benevolence of nature, we are logically required to infer that the cause of that natural order and natural benevolence was God — intelligent, wise, omnipotent, and good.

Understand that this argument from analogy lies at the heart of the case for natural religion. One discovers an exquisitely written book — the *Aeneid*, say — and one faces two choices. Could the print have tumbled down by chance, creating such meaning and beauty and order? Or do we not know, rather, that there was an intelligent author who designed this text? One comes across an exquisite

machine with interrelated parts magnificently designed, found in the clearing of a forest, and one knows one must infer a human mind that wisely and intentionally created it. Well, by analogy — and with such power — looking at this universe, so intricately designed, so adapted, with form and function related, harmonious, and orderly, we must now infer by analogy to what we would conclude about a human designer, that the cause of this universe could only be a mind infinitely wise, infinitely loving, infinitely good, infinitely powerful.

It is that argument that Philo, the voice of David Hume, addresses in the *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*.

The Four Fatal Flaws of Natural Theology

Philo first seeks to show that the philosophical limits and weaknesses of an empirical natural theology have dramatic implications for any religion that claims to be based upon it. Such an argument — basing religion upon inference from experience — has four fatal general flaws.

First, it left religion merely probable at best. Give all the force one would to the argument, it made belief a question of inference from experience, which could only be probabilistic. No knowledge derived from experience is logically necessary; it is always open to revision on the basis of further experience. Think back to our lecture on Locke and the person from the tropics who has never seen ice and does not believe there could be water one could walk across — he revises his sense of the world on the basis of new experience, and anything he believes is merely probable. Philo points out that an argument from the phenomena of nature would leave religion — one's belief in the existence of an omnipotent, good, wise, and designing God — merely probable at best, and always open to correction by further experience.

Second, Philo — that is to say, Hume — points out that this argument proceeds on the basis of an extremely weak analogy, because the dissimilarities between the universe and the works of men are far more striking than any similarities. Suppose one had experience of the circulation of blood in animals and now observes a tree, noticing it has sap. One's temptation might be to say, there must be a beating heart inside that tree circulating the sap. But in fact there are far more dissimilarities than similarities between a tree and an animal. Well, there are far more dissimilarities than similarities between the universe and anything that a human being has ever made. And yet natural religion asks us to infer a cause of the universe analogous to the cause of a work made by a human hand. It would be foolish to draw inferences about the causes of the one from knowledge of the causes of the other.

Third, the analogy is vitiated by the fact that the universe is the only one of its kind that we know. The reason we know that something is a human machine rather than a natural product — when we find it in the clearing in the forest — is because we have had a large number of experiences of both. We know many natural products and we know many human-designed machines, and so we can draw inferences and make often weak but nonetheless significant analogies. But we know only one universe. If we had experience of the causes of a large number of universes, then we might infer something about the cause of another universe — by weak analogy, but at least by plausible analogy. In fact, not only do we know only one universe, we know that one very partially indeed. The universe is vast, and we know the smallest part of it. And yet we are asked to draw inferences from this partial acquaintance about what the cause of such a universe must necessarily be. How scientifically could one draw inferences about its necessary or even probable cause?

Fourth, and importantly, in all scientific questions — in all matters of inference from natural phenomena — negative evidence counts even more than positive evidence in the confirmation or disconfirmation of a hypothesis. But what do the partisans of natural religion do? They cite the order of the universe. But that simply will not do, because there is also evidence of disorder, and both require explanation from the cause one assigns. If someone said, look at this room — this house could only have been designed by a master architect — but everywhere else in the house things are falling down and in disrepair, the last inference you would draw is a master architect. You would count the negative evidence even more than the positive. Well, look at the universe: suns are extinguished, things die and decompose, children are stillborn. The miracle of birth must be counterpoised against the tragedy of death during childbirth. You cannot count only the positive evidence. The partisans of natural religion say, look at the system — we get rain, and crops grow — and they ignore the evidence of drought and flood. But if we are asked to infer a necessary cause of the universe from the evidence, we must look at all the evidence, and negative evidence counts even more. What, in fact, convinces us that this universe — with its flaws, its defects, its imperfections — could not have arranged itself by chance without design?

Following the Analogy to Its Logical Conclusions

But as weak as the analogy is, Hume argues, let us address it on its own terms. Let us grant the terms of the analogy and follow its principle that like causes must be inferred from like effects. If the works of man and the universe are as similar as the natural religionists claim, we must infer a similar cause. Well, what would we logically infer from the universe by such an analogy? Using it consistently, Philo argues, the evidence of the universe would

conclude against all of the essential attributes of God. The cause of the world would not have the qualities that natural religion seeks to ascribe to it.

For example, natural religion wants to say that God is infinite, but the universe has only finite effects. By analogy, therefore, the cause of the universe should be finite. When you see a finite work by a human being, you do not say this play must have been written by an infinite author — it is very good, to be sure, but if the effect is finite you infer a finite cause. Everything in the universe is finite. Why would we infer infinity?

Why would we infer perfection? There are so many flaws in the world, so many things that go wrong and do not work, that by analogy this universe might be a botched and rejected work by some child deity that could not do it right — a failed experiment, and we find ourselves inhabiting it. Are we supposed to be living in the midst of failure and inferring from it the perfection of its cause?

Further, we could not infer the unity of God from this analogy, because of the sheer diversity of effects in the world. From the size and diversity of the universe, if we make an analogy to human production, we would infer that many workers created the world. If one comes across a building with fifteen different components involving remarkably different skills, arts, and crafts, one knows there has been a multiplicity of workers. Following that analogy consistently, there would be no unity of God.

Further, there could be no incorporeality — no spirituality of God — because in all of our experience, we have never seen a human work made by a mind without the interposition of a body, of material agencies: hands, feet, physical tools. By analogy, then, the cause of the universe must have a body.

Further, we would not infer the intelligence of the cause of the universe by means of this analogy, because the world is not, on examination, a machine requiring an intelligent designer. The world is filled with growth and decay — that is not what a machine is all about. Following the analogy, we would assume that the world resembles a vegetable far more than it resembles a watch or a knitting loom. So perhaps, Philo argues ironically, the cause of the universe is a supreme seed. Or indeed, much about the world appears to be living and animal in character — it resembles a living entity more than a machine. Should we then infer, as the cause of the universe, a supreme egg?

Hume, of course, is not seriously arguing for these specific conclusions. What he is attempting to do is to discredit the entire natural theological enterprise from within its own premises.

Further still, if we follow the analogy, we would never infer supreme — let alone infinite — wisdom, because human beings improve on the design of nature all the time. That is precisely what we do in medicine, in our care of the young and the elderly, and in agriculture through countless improvements and rearrangements of the natural world. If we can improve upon the work, the last thing we would infer from the work is infinite wisdom in its maker.

The Problem of Evil

Most massively, there is for Hume the problem of evil. If our experience of nature proves the infinite goodness of its cause, then why does all of our human literature speak of the miseries, pains, and uncertainties of life? If a good and wise parent could save children from disease, earthquake, or plague, that parent would. If a parent did not, we would not call that parent good or wise. What does this do to the analogy?

The partisans of natural religion cite the survival of the species as the greatest argument for divine design. But that is only partial evidence — we do not even know whether all species survive, which is methodologically unacceptable in science, since negative evidence must count even more. Further, how do the species survive? They survive by mutual war, by a kind of brute and blind force that involves the misery and death of countless individual beings. Is that what one would expect or predict of an infinitely perfect being?

Philo writes: to know that the world is not what one would predict of an infinitely loving, omnipotent being — walk into any children's ward in a hospital, and then talk about the need to infer an infinitely loving, infinitely powerful cause of all things.

Finite, imperfect human beings could improve upon nature if consulted. If asked how to design a universe better, Philo says, he could answer readily. First, eliminate pain. Second, proceed by particular rather than general law — let the good live longer and have the wicked die young. Third, expand the powers and faculties of human life: make us wiser, deeper, smarter, with greater perceptual range. And fourth, correct the inaccurate workmanship that produces catastrophic floods from excess rain and catastrophic drought from excess heat.

The Four Logical Possibilities

Philo sets out what he takes to be the only four logical possibilities to be weighed in light of all the evidence: that the world could only be as we observe it to be if the cause of things was, first, infinitely good — as the natural religionists claim; or second, if the cause was infinitely evil; or third, if the cause was composed of warring opposites of good and evil; or fourth, if the cause of the universe were neither good nor evil.

Perfect goodness in the cause is disproven by suffering, pain, and imperfection. Perfect malice is disproven by pleasure and well-being. Warring opposites are disproven by the uniformity of nature's general laws. This logically leaves only the last explanation: that the cause of the universe as we observe it is indifferent to good and evil, and is neither good nor evil.

Miracles, Immortality, and the Relevance of Religion

These arguments of Hume's *Dialogues* are both powerful and consistent with his earlier published philosophical writings, chapters of which on these themes had already tarnished his reputation in certain influential circles. Taken together with these earlier writings, the conclusions of the *Dialogues* leave little room not only for natural religion, but for Christianity as well.

In his *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Hume wrote on miracles with dramatic implications for the sorts of proofs of Christianity that Locke had urged. By miracle we mean a violation of the experience and laws of nature — but our knowledge is of the experience and laws of nature; that is all our knowledge is. If someone argues that something has occurred which we must understand as a violation of the laws of nature, and hence miraculous, I would have to weigh two possibilities: which would be more miraculous, more unbelievable in the light of natural experience? One, that this event did not happen; or two, that the falsehood, deception, or error in recounting the event could not possibly have occurred.

If someone tells me — and think of the implication — that Queen Elizabeth died, was succeeded on the throne, and then, after a period of being dead, came back from the dead to rule again, I would have to weigh which is more improbable given our experience of the

world. And what would I conclude? I would conclude it was far more likely that people were fooled or deceived, or were perpetuating for political or pious reasons a fraud, or that they were superstitious or prone to error, than that Queen Elizabeth arose from the dead after days in the tomb. The issue, always, is which possibility would be more unbelievable — more truly miraculous.

Hume also addresses the immortality of the soul. What natural religion argues is that there must be a heaven, because we know the universe to be designed by an infinitely just God, and yet we see the evil prosper and the good suffer. Therefore, we say, there must be an afterlife in which this imbalance is compensated. But from the very first set of evidence — that the wicked prosper and the good suffer — precisely what one should infer is that the universe is not the work of an infinitely loving and just being. If your greengrocer sold you apples the top row of which were all bad and rotten, would you say: well, I can see from this that he is a perfect greengrocer — the apples on the bottom must be truly magnificent? Certainly not.

Hume also argued for the irrelevance of religion to civic duty. He wrote: "Nothing can preserve the genuine principles of morality in our judgment of human conduct but the absolute necessity of these principles to the existence of society." It is the reality of human and social life, not religion, that gives us our civic duty and our virtues.

Conclusion

But for Hume, these were dangerous beliefs to disseminate widely. People seemed to need religion, and his fear was that without it they would adopt superstitious religions and become subject to demagogues. Disbelief was therefore best presented in difficult philosophical arguments — but those arguments were nonetheless there in the culture, available to those capable of following them.

One might choose to believe in God in the wake of Hume, but it would not be from the optimistic perspective that our natural faculties know God and God's goodness through nature, and should use nature as their moral guide. Hume's *Dialogues* are a powerful challenge to the optimism of natural religion, and their force has never been fully answered.

Lecture 47: Adam Smith and the Origins of Political Economy

Professor Jeremy Shermer

Introduction

In this lecture, I am going to talk about Adam Smith, who lived from 1723 to 1790. Let me first say something about the overall structure of the lecture. First, I will say something about Smith himself. Next, I will highlight some of the key themes from his *Wealth of Nations*, in particular the division of labor and its various ramifications. I will then turn to his *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, which contains Smith's ideas about morality and its foundations, but which in a sense also suggests how we might understand the legal foundations of the kind of society he describes in *The Wealth of Nations*. Finally, I will discuss the disadvantages of commercial society and some of the broader lessons we can draw from Smith's work.

Smith: Life and Works

Let me start by saying a little bit about Smith himself. He lived, as I mentioned, from 1723 to 1790. He was a Scot, and he worked variously as a lecturer, as a tutor to a nobleman, as a customs official, and very much as a writer. His key works were, on the one side, his *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, published in 1759, and his best-known book, *The Wealth of Nations*, published in 1776. There are also a couple of other works published posthumously which are in some ways quite important: the *Lectures on Jurisprudence* and the *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*. These were compiled from students' notes. Professors today might be rather worried about the idea of their students' notes being published, but at the time when Smith

was lecturing and teaching, it was quite common for students to make detailed transcripts and for these to be circulated.

Why does Smith matter? There are three things I want to highlight. First, his work offers a fascinating picture of what he called commercial society and how it functions — an enormously powerful vision of what a commercial society is like. Second, Smith had and continues to have an important ideological impact. Consider the Reagan and Thatcher periods: one sees in photographs of that era staffers wearing Adam Smith neckties, which indicates the attraction of Smith's work to conservatives and free-marketeers of that period. On the other side, however, there is another kind of ideological impact as well. Smith in some of his writings depicted the disadvantages of commercial society and the problems of work under the advanced division of labor in terms graphic enough still to be quoted by Karl Marx — a leading critic of capitalism and of precisely the kind of thing that the Thatcher and Reagan people favored.

The Wealth of Nations and the Division of Labor

Let me turn now to *The Wealth of Nations*, and in particular to its key theme: the division of labor. Smith illustrates this by discussing the example of a pin-making workshop, and he talks about the enormous gains in productivity that come about as a result of specialization. He asks you to picture an individual making pins on his own, doing the entire job himself, and to contrast this with a situation in which the making of pins is split up into many different operations — some people specializing in making the heads of pins, others the shafts, others perhaps folding the paper in which they are packaged, and so on. His argument is that if such operations are

divided into many small tasks and then combined, you get an enormous growth in productivity and a huge growth in wealth.

What is important, however, is that these operations need to be coordinated. Clearly, if one person is making pin heads and another pin shafts, and the person making pin heads gets rather excited and churns out more and more of them, the result is eventually going to be a horrible discoordination — workers having to tread their way over pin heads. What you need in this setting is someone to coordinate these efforts, and in a workshop this is clearly going to be done by the manager.

What is distinctive about Smith's account is that implicit within it is the idea that the division of labor takes place not just within an individual workshop, but more generally within society as a whole — that the people making pins are making use of materials that other people elsewhere are preparing, and that those people are also specializing. But what is really significant in this aspect of his discussion is that the division of labor and the coordination of activity at the level of society takes place not through the efforts of some grand societal equivalent of a factory manager, but rather through people being guided by prices and economic self-interest. Smith offers a picture of a way in which activities in a society can be coordinated by people following their self-interest and directing their efforts toward those areas in which they can get the highest return. They are guided by prices.

A really neat illustration of this theme — one found in Smith and subsequently popularized by the American economic essayist Leonard Read — is the example of a pencil, which has been used by just about every economist who discusses these matters ever since. Take a pencil: you have graphite in the middle, some wood, some paint, a piece of metal, and an eraser made of rubber. What Read suggested one should do is consider just how many different

people's activities are involved in producing that pencil. Think of the timber, perhaps harvested from forests in the Pacific Northwest by people who have no idea that their efforts will ultimately contribute to making a pencil. The rubber in the eraser might come from Malaysia; the metal is being mined somewhere else; the paint similarly. One can take the thing a step further back as well, because the people cutting the timber are not doing it with their bare hands — they are using tools and power sources which are in turn being made by yet other people. One arrives at a picture of thousands, or in a sense even millions, of people being involved in a cooperative effort to produce a pencil, when they do not know who else is involved, do not know what their activities are ultimately going to make, and may not only be strangers to one another but, if they did know one another, might not particularly like one another. And yet they are brought by this mechanism of self-interest and prices into a form of cooperation.

This illustrates a couple of broader themes from Smith's work. He stresses very much that in a commercial society, we get what we need from other people by appealing to their self-interest, rather than looking to their benevolence or begging for their charity. This does not mean that he disliked benevolence or charity; he said, rather, that we have this powerful mechanism which can accomplish things that those other mechanisms cannot. In the case of the market, as illustrated by the pencil, people are led by self-interest to cooperate and to produce things which they were not deliberately setting out to make. Smith generalizes from this, and in an expression which has subsequently become quite well known, he talks about people being guided as if by an invisible hand — meaning that particularly self-interested actions, but sometimes others too, lead to desirable social consequences which the individuals in question are not deliberately setting out to bring about.

You may ask: how does all of this work? And are the unintended consequences of human action really always good? To answer this question, we need to move from *The Wealth of Nations* to the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, and on the question of whether unintended consequences are always beneficial, to look also at the final edition of the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, where Smith had a few second thoughts, and at some of the ideas from his *Lectures on Jurisprudence*.

The Theory of Moral Sentiments

One might ask, particularly in view of the foregoing discussion of *The Wealth of Nations*, whether Smith thinks that people are simply self-interested. The answer is actually no. He has quite a fine feel for the different and rather complex moral motivations that people possess, and he offers some distinctive and interesting ideas about how human morality works. The ideas from the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* also play a key role in his work in explaining the legal and behavioral framework of *The Wealth of Nations*, and in explaining why he thought people would comply with it. Clearly, the ideas of *The Wealth of Nations* — and in particular this notion of people cooperating without deliberately intending to — are only going to work if people are guided by their self-interest to trade with one another, rather than simply to rob one another. It is the ideas of the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* working in the background that explains, on Smith's account, why people go along with the broad legal framework, and why they behave in a moral manner rather than pursuing self-interest by theft.

The key ideas from the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* are, I think, these. First, Smith pictures us as wanting the approval of other people — as living our lives in a situation where we fundamentally want others to

approve of what we are doing. He talks about the way in which the reactions of other people serve as a kind of mirror in which we can see features of ourselves that we would otherwise be unable to perceive. There is a nice image of this offered in the work of Smith's friend and Scottish compatriot David Hume, who suggested it is a bit like how we might discover that we have bad breath — this is not really something you determine on your own, but rather something you infer when you notice people stepping back and wincing slightly as you speak. Some features of our conduct and character can only be perceived by observing other people's reactions to us — rather like discovering whether or not we are handsome or attractive, about which one really has no idea until one sees how others respond.

Other people make these judgments on us, and Smith's account is that we are oriented toward them and come to internalize them — we seek to behave in ways that other people will approve of. But, and this is an important qualification, other people may get things wrong. You may be behaving in a perfectly reasonable way, but other people disapprove because they are biased against you or ill-informed. What Smith argues is that what we do is to correct the actual judgments of particular people in the light of how they would judge our conduct if they were properly informed. He talks in this context of the significance of the impartial spectator — someone who stands to one side, observing what is happening, not being passionately involved in it, but assessing whether the kind of thing we are doing is the kind of thing such an impartial spectator could approve of. Smith offers a picture in which we come to refine the judgments of specific individuals by considering what the impartial spectator would make of our actions, orienting ourselves accordingly, and then being guided by that standard. We internalize those judgments — tidied up, as it were — as conscience. So Smith offers a fundamentally social account of conscience: it is not, for

Smith, the voice of God inside us so much as a refined version of the judgments of our parents, our friends, and our neighbors.

Social Order and the Theory of Ranks

Smith also has some interesting ideas about social order — about how a society works and why people obey the law. His account is brief but suggestive. He says that in part people obey the law because they perceive that it is useful. This, he thinks, will be most apparent to those who are very wealthy or who own large estates, who can clearly see the connection between their own self-interest and others being law-abiding. But what about more ordinary people? Here Smith offers a strange but rather intriguing account which he discusses in the context of what he calls the theory of ranks.

What he suggests is that there is an odd but significant mechanism at work whereby ordinary people project their ideals of what a good life would be onto the lives of those who appear fortunate or favored. To take a vivid example: an agricultural laborer of Smith's time, watching the rich landowner pass in his carriage, would think how marvelous it would be to be in that position, and projects his ideals of the good life onto this person — the reality of whose life may in some ways be rather ordinary and tedious. Smith suggests that we are influenced by this picture of an idealized life which we project onto such figures, and that we then act to further their wishes and go along with their judgments, even though there is nothing directly in it for us.

This may seem far-fetched, but consider the following. You switch on the television and see some product being endorsed by a leading sports figure. The advertising people are quite canny — they would not spend enormous sums paying these figures unless it actually had some effect on us. It is not far-fetched to think of what is going on as a mechanism rather like the one Smith was describing: we seem to be unduly influenced by the judgments of people in favored

positions. In Smith's own society, those people were typically landowners, rich merchants, perhaps the king — people whose own judgments, for often quite pragmatic reasons, would be very much on the side of law, order, and decent behavior. Smith's suggestion was that ordinary people are influenced by these judgments through this rather odd mechanism.

Moral Codes and Justice

Smith also offers some interesting ideas in terms of explaining and analyzing moral and legal codes. He argues that the mechanisms of the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* — this business of sympathizing with the judgments that others make and being affected by them — produce different outcomes in different cultures. In a hunter-gatherer society, for example, people may judge extraordinary acts of bravery very favorably, whereas in a society like ours, we might feel that those behaving in such ways are being rather foolish. Smith thus offers an explanatory theory which says that what spectators will approve of will differ in different kinds of societies, and that this may serve to explain why you get different moral codes in different societies.

He also has some ideas about how notions of justice emerge. He suggests that we may react particularly strongly to injustice — seeing something that really is not right — and that notions of justice and notions of law emerge as a result of people working these instinctive reactions into more systematic form.

The Disadvantages of Commercial Society

One might ask whether Smith has an uncritical view of the desirable consequences of self-interest and of the natural mechanisms of human motivation. That is perhaps a fair characterization of the first edition of the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, but as Smith got older he

became less optimistic. In this context, it is important to pay attention to what he says about the disadvantages of commercial society, which one finds in the *Lectures on Jurisprudence* and in *The Wealth of Nations* itself.

What does he say? First, he discusses the disadvantages of the division of labor — both physical and mental. On the physical side, he observes that if people spend all their time on one trivial part of a complex process, it may have bad consequences on their bodies. We are now familiar with repetitive strain injury and problems of this kind — Smith was already onto this, and the very mechanism he highlighted as generating wealth he also identified as bringing with it such disadvantages.

He also discussed the mental effects. If people's attention is narrowed onto some trivial and repetitive operation — we might now think of it in terms of a mechanized conveyor-belt job — they may in the end be somewhat better off materially than they were when living in the countryside, but concentrating on such things all the time may, he said, make them profoundly dull — unable to engage with issues of politics or to carry on a sensible conversation, their minds having been crippled by the monotony of their labor.

Smith was also concerned about problems arising from the movement of people from life in a small village to the large anonymous cities that were growing up in his time. In a small village, a person has, as Smith describes it, a character to lose. If you are up to no good, other people know you and will notice. If you have too much to drink and go home singing loudly, there will be gossip about it the next morning. If you are seen going off with someone you should not be going off with, people will speak about it. Contrast this with the situation of an ordinary person who moves from a small village to a large city: they suddenly become anonymous. They realize that no one actually cares very much what they do, provided

they do not break the law in a flagrant manner. Smith worried that the result of this would be that the mechanisms of the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* would no longer operate, because those mechanisms really depended on one's conduct being monitored by other people. If no one knows who you are and no one cares what you are doing, Smith feared, people may fall into degeneracy and vice.

Finally, in the last revision of the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* — published in the year of Smith's death — he returned to the theme of the theory of ranks, expressing concerns about what happens when wealthy people follow fashion and waste their money on expensive trinkets. The worry was not really about the wealthy themselves — they have plenty of money to waste. What concerned Smith was that the operation of the theory of ranks meant that these things would then influence ordinary people. If the rich became bad role models, and if ordinary people were influenced by their judgments through the mechanism Smith himself had described, then the wealthy leading people astray would do real harm to those who could least afford it. One might think in this context that the same concern applies readily to celebrity culture in our own society.

Broader Lessons

What does this mean in terms of the wider lessons from Smith's work? First, Smith offers a vision of commercial society — of an extended society in which people are trading with one another — as a self-coordinating mechanism. You do not require, on Smith's account, anyone playing the role of society's manager in the way a factory manager coordinates a workshop. This is indeed why libertarians and market-oriented conservatives got so excited about Adam Smith and wore those neckties — they were reacting against

notions of the planned society, and Smith seemed to be offering an account of society as self-coordinating, not requiring government planners. Smith also argues that these mechanisms operate in the interests of everybody, not just the rich.

Second, there is a richness about Smith's account and an awareness of problems and complexities from which we can still learn. Above all, Smith has a fine sense of trade-offs. Note in particular that the very mechanism which in his account generates wealth — the division of labor — is also responsible for the grave problems of commercial society and the damaging effects on individuals. What does Smith offer by way of remedies? In *The Wealth of Nations* he turns to this issue and suggests a real, if somewhat limited, agenda for government action to address these matters — typically, in his account, through the encouragement of education. He does not offer a remedy for the physical disadvantages of labor, but he is clearly very concerned about moral decline and about the intellectually impoverished outlook to which specialized labor may lead. In this context, Smith is arguing that there is a legitimate role for government, and it is quite important to note that despite what some of those wearing the Adam Smith ties might say, Smith himself is not a dogmatic defender of laissez-faire. He offers a powerful vision of commercial society while allowing room for a moderate degree of governmental intervention.

Conclusion

All this gives us quite a great deal to think about, particularly concerning our own society. Do the benefits of the division of labor outweigh its disadvantages? Does the operation of commercial society work in ways that benefit the poor, as Smith maintained? Certainly, if one looks at our own society as a commercial society, the

very rich are doing pretty nicely — but on Smith's account, he wanted to stress very strongly that it operated in such a way that the poor benefited as well. Is this really the case? And more generally: are the unintended consequences of the pursuit of self-interest always, or indeed by and large, to the good? Can we go along today with the kind of optimism about these matters that Smith himself displayed? These raise a whole range of provocative questions, and on this note I need to conclude.

To summarize what we have covered: I began with a brief introduction to Smith and his background and concerns. I then illustrated the key themes of *The Wealth of Nations*, in particular his account of the division of labor and its enormous benefits. I turned then to the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, discussing his account of how morality operates, his account of the legal framework which forms the setting for *The Wealth of Nations*, and his theory of ranks. And finally, I addressed the disadvantages of commercial society, how they are to be weighed against the advantages, and what some of the broader lessons from Smith's work might be for understanding and evaluating the issues that arise in our own society. Thank you very much.

Lecture 48: Rousseau's Descent

Professor Alan Kors

Introduction

We lecture now on Rousseau's descent — a descent from the central principles, in so many ways, of the French Enlightenment. So much is different about Jean-Jacques Rousseau: his artisanal background, his self-education, his Genevan Protestant origins, his sense of himself as a solitary man in an age of sociability.

A fervent deist — which he shares with the French Enlightenment, someone who believes in the existence of the God of nature, known through nature, but who has rejected the Judeo-Christian tradition — even there Rousseau strikes a dissonant chord. He has a passionate deism and a deep aversion to the atheist's attempt to disprove or criticize proofs of God. His own arguments for the existence of God, he claims, to avoid the sorts of arguments made by figures such as Philo, require not only reason but good faith and sincere feeling. He distrusts the motives of the atheistic philosophers — a handful of whom he has met in the Parisian salons — thinking they use their reason only for their own fame or glory, not sincerely to know the truth. Who, he asks, could sincerely doubt God while looking at nature and its designs?

So reason, Rousseau argues, can be the enemy of truth and virtue. And indeed he will also conclude that what the new philosophers — the *philosophes* of the French Enlightenment in particular — call progress can likewise be the enemy of truth and virtue.

The Discourse on the Arts and Sciences (1749)

Rousseau explodes onto the European intellectual scene with his *Discourse on the Arts and Sciences*, published in 1749. He argues both from history and from rational analysis that progress in the arts and sciences has led us away from virtue — has lessened rather than increased virtue in the world.

Rousseau first turns to historical evidence, arguing that what we learn from the study of the past is that moral decadence always accompanies cultural and intellectual progress. Since the Renaissance, our polite and cultivated society has lost its ancient virtues and strengths. Our social refinement covers a profound depravity, such as overtook Egypt and Greece and Rome after their own transitions from simpler societies to more cultivated and cultured ones.

If one compares, even contemporaneously, the simple Swiss and the American Indians to the cultivated Europeans, one finds that it is the former who compare favorably in terms of both virtue and happiness. No one will walk past you hurt in a forest in the land of the Iroquois, he argues — they will do it every day in Paris or London. And everyone understands, he writes, the moral superiority of Sparta in ancient Greece, where patriotism, love of country, and devotion to duty flourished, compared to cultured Athens, which was lost in decadence and vice and egoism.

For Rousseau, that historical evidence is consistent with a rational analysis that shows the linkage between cultural progress and moral decadence. The arts and sciences create and then satisfy artificial vices and human pride, serving luxury and vanity rather than our natural needs. Our natural need is hunger — from hunger comes food, and there is great satisfaction in the hunt and the meal after the hunt, and much comradeship in the hunt. But in cultivated

societies that have progressed in the arts and sciences, it is not food that people want — it is gold, social rank, a private chef, and sauces that impress all the neighbors. The arts and sciences serve our vanity and pride; they create artificial needs that gnaw at us and separate us from our fellow creatures.

There is a natural need for shelter. The arts and sciences create distinctions based upon the magnificence of artificial houses, and so one person living perfectly sheltered from the elements despairs that his neighbor lives in a larger or better house. The arts and sciences do not satisfy natural needs — they create artificial needs that then obsess and govern our lives. They lead to laziness and to boredom, with all the attendant vice. After the hunt and a meal, people were satisfied and relaxed. After the fine dinner in town, people are lazy and bored and prone to vice.

What drama there is in Rousseau's themes! Given the Enlightenment and given the debates about human culture and nature that have occurred ever since in the West, think of the profound questions Rousseau is raising that will have a permanent place in Western debate: the celebration of the primitive over the cultivated; the view that culture is decadence; the distinction between the natural and the artificial. How many countercultures, movements back to nature, and movements away from the artificial must be written in Rousseauist language since he wrote?

Rousseau's Natural Religion and Deism

To understand the development of these themes — which will lead to some of the most significant literature of the French eighteenth century — we must first understand Rousseau's natural religion, his deism, and his defense of providence. Let us therefore encounter the

Rousseau whom the *philosophes* first met at mid-century when he moved to Paris: Rousseau the fervent deist.

Rousseau believes that there are obvious proofs of God. Newton has shown us that matter is inert — it is indifferent to motion or rest — and yet we see motion in the world that must have a source external to matter. We see the spontaneous motion of living things; we see the ordered and lawful motions of the world; and we infer, if we are sincere, if we follow an inner light based upon good-faith exercise of the mind, that there is a will that is intelligent, wise, powerful, and good. Order cannot be the product of chance, and just as when we move our own arm our will is what moves matter from an immaterial source, so too with the universe.

But if we know ourselves to live in a universe created by an intelligent, wise, powerful, and good God, why is it then that we suffer so? In a world created by infinite goodness, how could there be evil? That is an essential question for Rousseau's deism, and he answers that we human beings are the cause of our own ills. Humanity is the king of nature because God has made us free, and it is better to be free than robotic — but we abuse the freedom that makes us supreme in the natural creation and do evil. Humans, not God, are the source of evil. It is what we have done, not what God has done, that has led to suffering. God offers ongoing love and providence; mankind offers ongoing wickedness.

We do ill even though we know the good, because God has engraved it on our conscience — a conscience which is universal, as shown by the agreement of the moral codes of all religions and nations. And what does conscience teach us? That we must seek the happiness of all, not our own happiness at the expense of others; that we must follow not the particular will that seeks our own well-being, but the general will that seeks our happiness through the happiness of that collective entity of which we are a part. That is how

God made us as human beings, but we abuse it. Self-interest is insufficient to explain human behavior — insufficient to explain heroism and sacrifice. Society has suppressed the natural man, and we must restore that being created by God to the greatest extent possible.

The Discourse on the Origins of Inequality (1755)

Rousseau's second discourse, *On the Origins of Inequality*, published in 1755, is a further justification of God's created nature against the human deformation of the world. In this work, Rousseau addresses the question of whether inequality — which he sees as the source of so much suffering — is natural or artificial, and he answers that it is not natural.

Rousseau draws a lyrical picture of a primitive, pre-social humanity that informs us of what we have lost as a result of civilization. In the state of nature, where we lived largely as isolated individuals, we were vigorous, naturally healthy, and morally sound. We were governed by self-love and compassion — if we saw a fellow sentient creature in distress, we aided it. We lived only according to natural instinct, without the torment of the passions or the fear of death. In a social sense, we were neither bad nor good, because we were isolated and asocial. There was no ownership of anything, including no ownership of women by men. If one was hungry, one took a fish out of a stream or fruit off a tree. The idea of saying "this is my tree" is absurd — the moment you fell asleep, someone would take what he wanted. There was no property in a state of nature.

Natural inequalities were all physical, but they were without serious consequences. A faster or stronger person could take larger or quicker animals; someone else would take slower animals, or fish, or fruit and nuts and berries. We think that we need our modern

society, Rousseau writes, but it is civilization that produces our ailments. There were many early deaths in nature — deaths of children who were not healthy or strong — but those who lived were wonderfully fit. That is what happens in a primitive world; that is what happens in the animal world. The American Indians are healthier than the Europeans. Do you doubt that? he writes. Put the two of them — one European, one Indian — in a forest and see who comes out after two months healthy and indeed alive.

The Great Tragedy: The Creation of Society

Human beings lived the natural life, but then there occurred what is in Rousseau's view the great tragedy of human history. Out of some perceived, ephemeral need to associate — to solve a temporary problem, perhaps a drought, perhaps a flood, perhaps too many savage animals — people created a permanent society. And once that line is crossed, there is never any going back, because society is a dominant, coercively triumphant form of human life that sweeps away the morally superior primitive. Civilized societies will always draw into their orbit, conquer, and overcome more primitive, though morally superior, forms of life.

And what does society introduce that had not existed in nature? It introduces unnatural forms of relationship. It creates property: *this is mine — you may not take from this part of nature*. It creates a division of labor and mutual dependence. It creates social inequality — the imposition first of the strong, then of the rich and clever. And to sustain that imposition, it creates arbitrary power that maintains social injustices which we come to think of as natural, but which are wholly a creation of culture.

Both master and dependent in this artificial world are the victims of its unnatural needs and social insecurities. Both would be happier living as natural equals. Both would be happier without the vices and the obsessions of the social world. Both are the victims of insecurity

and needs created only by an unnatural society. And the attempt to satisfy these unnatural, artificial social needs has done something awful to human beings, through and through. It has stifled conscience. It has stifled natural compassion. It has made us separate from each other and wholly selfish and self-obsessed. And we now find ourselves — as Marx will repeat in the nineteenth century — separated from our real nature as a species. But for Rousseau, that means we find ourselves in society separated from our God-given nature as a species.

Remedies: Education and the Social Contract

In the wake of Rousseau's analysis of our ills, the question becomes: what do we do now? There is no going back to a pre-social state. For Rousseau, there are two means of partial reparation: first, education, and second, setting a new moral foundation to politics that will undo the worst of the social state.

Education: Emile

On education, Rousseau writes his book *Emile*, his treatise on education, arguing that we must seek to create the greatest amount of natural learning for the child as an inoculation against social depravity. The goal is direct education by nature — not by men, not by things, not by books. Let children learn from their real experience of attempting to satisfy their real needs in the natural world.

Education, Rousseau insists, begins in infancy. We swaddle our children tightly to teach them restraint, thinking it makes them safe, thinking it prevents them from touching their bodies and exploring themselves. What it actually teaches is slavery. Let the child learn natural freedom and natural affections. He argues against swaddling clothes, and he argues for changing the practices of French upper-class culture by having mothers breastfeed and raise their own

children rather than giving them to wet nurses, so that the child from the beginning learns real affection and real, natural relationships rather than artificial and purchased ones.

Let the child learn not by rote — which means nothing — but by experience. Do you want to teach a child geography? When he is hungry, take him out and get lost in the forest, and let him reason out from nature where the sun rises and sets, which way a brook flows, on which side of a tree the moss grows, the topography of the land. Let the child form a strong body and keen senses, developing confidence in what God gave us to learn with. Develop the intellect by observation and always by promoting reasoning in the service of real needs.

Similarly, let the student learn morals from natural consequences. If he breaks a window in disrespect of property, have him sleep exposed to the insects, the heat, the cold, or the rain. The child will learn respect. Let the child experience mutually beneficial interactions that depend upon real ethical principles and relationships. Avoid religious education until adolescence — what can a child understand about ultimate things? Understanding should always relate to the real needs of life.

And teach the student a useful, honest trade, not a career. Let the student learn to make something — a good that is traded in value because other people truly need it. In short, inoculate the student from the moment of birth against social depravity, and send the most natural person possible into the world of men.

Government: The Social Contract

The second remedy is government. In *The Social Contract*, Rousseau argues that a proper understanding of the nature and basis of government can make moral rather than depraved citizens out of us, even in the social state.

In most variants of eighteenth-century social contract theory — John Locke's, Cesare Beccaria's in Italy — the social contract is looked upon as a circumstance in which individuals trade the minimum necessary amount of their individual liberty for security within the state. But in Rousseau's social contract, all individual freedom is given to the state. Unlike Hobbes' social contract, Rousseau's insists that one's happiness in this social contract can only be one's share of the happiness of the whole society.

Think of it as a corporation. Each individual is an equal participant — an equal shareholder — in society. The only way the individual can profit, the only way the individual can be happy, is by working such that the whole collective entity prospers and is happy. Your equal share of that collective happiness is the benefit you gain from society. And in such a model, politics itself forces you to work for the well-being of all. When one's self-interest can only be pursued by pursuing the well-being of all others, society becomes a means to overcome selfishness and alienation, and to permit moral beings to exist in a civilized society.

To achieve that, one must recognize that in politics, only the general will — that which seeks the interest of all — has political authority. Even if a majority of citizens vote for something, if they are a majority seeking individual gain, that is illegitimate authority within the state. It has no claim. It does not embody the social contract and the general will. Only those who seek the interest of all have political legitimacy and can exercise sovereignty.

This has certain profound democratic tendencies: the general will arises from all and applies to all. But there is no legitimacy to an immoral or depraved majority — only to the general will. Only that general will, seeking the interest of all, is sovereign, not a majority as such.

This makes us subject, when we are subject to the general will, to our moral selves — human beings who seek the well-being of all — which forces us, in Rousseau's celebrated phrase, *forces us to be free*: unenslaved to our own or to others' artificial power, even while in society. And to preserve that general will in the social contract, there must be no factions, no gulf between rich and poor, and no society too large for democratic self-governance.

Conclusion: The Rousseauist Legacy

The Rousseauist legacy is always present and always active in the West from that moment on. The view that there is a conflict between nature and civilization, that we have suffered losses and discontents and made ourselves unhappy; the view that there is an original species-nature which society must seek to restore; the view that freedom is being governed by the general rather than the particular will, by virtue rather than by self-interest.

Thus both the Jacobins of the French Revolution and the communal counterculture can lay claims to Rousseau. Thus, as you will see, both Kant's specific categorical imperative and the totalitarian submergence of the individual into the corporate body can both lay claims to Rousseau. He is with us still. Thank you very much.

Coda to Part IV: The Enlightenment and Its Critics

The story of the Enlightenment is often told as a triumph. It is the story of reason liberating itself from superstition, of science replacing dogma, of inquiry overcoming authority, and of humanity discovering its capacity to shape its own future. There is truth in that narrative. The thinkers we have encountered throughout this part of the course transformed the intellectual landscape of the modern world in ways that are difficult to exaggerate. They challenged inherited assumptions, expanded the boundaries of knowledge, and developed new conceptions of politics, morality, religion, and human nature that continue to shape our lives today.

Yet the deeper lesson of Part IV is more complex than a simple story of progress.

The Enlightenment inherited the intellectual revolutions of the Renaissance and the Age of Reason and sought to apply their methods as broadly as possible. If the scientific revolution had revealed the laws governing the natural world, Enlightenment thinkers wondered whether similar principles might be discovered in human affairs. If reason could explain the motions of planets, perhaps it could also explain the origins of government, the foundations of morality, the organization of society, and the proper limits of authority.

This confidence animated many of the era's greatest achievements. Locke articulated a powerful theory of natural rights and government by consent that would profoundly influence modern liberal democracy. Montesquieu explored the separation of powers. Voltaire challenged religious intolerance and defended intellectual freedom. The Encyclopedists sought to gather and organize all human knowledge. Across Europe and North America, the belief spread that

human beings could improve their condition through education, science, reform, and rational inquiry.

Underlying these projects was a remarkable faith in human reason. The Enlightenment did not merely celebrate knowledge. It trusted that knowledge could be expanded indefinitely and employed for the benefit of humanity. Progress was no longer understood as an accidental possibility. It became an expectation.

At the same time, the Enlightenment forced difficult questions upon religion. The biblical and theological certainties that had structured medieval civilization came under increasing scrutiny. Deists attempted to preserve belief in a rational creator while discarding supernatural revelation. Others moved further toward skepticism. The authority of tradition weakened as individuals increasingly claimed the right to examine beliefs for themselves.

Yet even as the Enlightenment challenged old certainties, it generated new tensions of its own.

No thinker illustrates this more dramatically than David Hume. By carrying empiricism to its logical conclusions, Hume exposed profound difficulties at the heart of human knowledge. Our beliefs about causation, the self, and even the external world appeared less secure than Enlightenment optimism had assumed. Reason remained powerful, but perhaps not powerful enough to justify all the conclusions people expected it to support. Skepticism returned, not as a relic of antiquity, but as a consequence of modern philosophy itself.

Similarly, figures such as Berkeley demonstrated that Enlightenment methods could produce deeply unexpected results. Rather than leading inevitably toward secularism or materialism, rational inquiry could also generate sophisticated defenses of religious belief. The Enlightenment was never as intellectually uniform as later caricatures suggest. It contained competing visions of reason, competing

understandings of science, and competing conceptions of human flourishing.

Perhaps this is the most important insight to carry forward. The Enlightenment did not settle the great questions of philosophy. It transformed them. Questions that had once been framed in theological terms increasingly became questions about knowledge, experience, freedom, progress, rights, and human nature. The authority of revelation gave way to the authority of reason, but reason itself became an object of scrutiny.

The achievements of the Enlightenment were extraordinary. Constitutional government, scientific inquiry, religious toleration, individual rights, and intellectual freedom all owe an immense debt to this period. Yet by the end of the eighteenth century, cracks had begun to appear in the Enlightenment worldview. The French Revolution demonstrated that reason and liberty could produce both emancipation and terror. Industrialization introduced forms of social change that few Enlightenment thinkers had anticipated. Economic transformation disrupted traditional communities. Nationalism emerged as a powerful force. Romanticism challenged the supremacy of rational calculation by emphasizing emotion, imagination, history, and culture.

The confidence of the eighteenth century was about to encounter the realities of the nineteenth.

This transition brings us directly to Part V.

The Age of Ideology begins where the Enlightenment leaves off. The central question is no longer whether reason can improve the world. The question becomes what kind of world reason should create. The nineteenth century inherits the aspirations of the Enlightenment but subjects them to new pressures generated by revolution, industrial capitalism, nationalism, secularization, and unprecedented social

change. Old authorities have weakened, but no consensus has emerged regarding what should replace them.

The result is an explosion of competing intellectual systems. German Idealism seeks to complete the philosophical project left unfinished by the Enlightenment. Romanticism reacts against excessive rationalism. Positivism places its faith in science. Socialism challenges the inequalities of industrial society. Existentialism explores the problem of meaning in a world increasingly detached from traditional religious frameworks. Each movement claims to understand the direction of history and the path toward human fulfillment.

The word "ideology" captures both the ambition and the danger of this new era. Thinkers increasingly offer comprehensive explanations of society, history, and human destiny. The dream of reason survives, but it becomes attached to grand visions of political, economic, and cultural transformation.

Part IV taught us to trust inquiry. Part V will explore what happens when ideas seek not merely to understand the world, but to remake it. The age of reason now gives way to the age of conviction, and the consequences will shape the modern world in ways that remain with us still.

Part V: The Age of Ideology

Preamble

There is a peculiar vertigo that can accompany genuine intellectual progress. The more confidently a civilization believes it has unlocked the secrets of the universe, the more unsettling it is when the very tools of that unlocking turn against the lock-maker. Part IV of this course ended with Newton's triumph — the discovery that three laws of motion and a single formula for gravity could account for the architecture of the heavens — and with the cultural mood that triumph produced: the conviction that reason, properly applied, could illuminate everything. Part V begins in the long shadow of that triumph, asking what happens when reason examines itself and discovers its own limits, and when the social world that reason was supposed to improve begins to generate new forms of suffering, alienation, and ideological conflict that none of the philosophes had fully anticipated. The twelve lectures gathered here trace the intellectual consequences of that reckoning across one of the most turbulent and creative centuries in Western thought.

The introductory lecture sets the scene with appropriate urgency. The nineteenth century was not merely a period of philosophical debate but of world-historical transformation: the French Revolution and its Napoleonic aftermath, the Industrial Revolution and the miseries it brought to factory workers and displaced rural populations, the rise of nationalism and its attendant wars, the higher criticism of the Bible that began to make scripture historically contingent rather than divinely fixed, and above all the gathering force of Darwinian evolutionary theory, which by mid-century had done more than any philosophical argument to displace the comfortable natural theology that had sustained educated European faith since Newton. Into this volatile environment comes a roster of

thinkers who are not merely debating academic questions but responding, with extraordinary urgency and passion, to a civilization in the midst of becoming something new and not yet knowing what that something was.

Kant is the great hinge on which Part V turns, and he receives two lectures accordingly. The metaphor proposed for him — the Shiva figure who both destroys and creates — captures something genuine. His Critique of Pure Reason completes the Enlightenment project in one sense: it takes the triumph of Newtonian science with full seriousness and asks, with unprecedented rigor, what must be true about the human mind for such knowledge to be possible. His answer — that the mind actively imposes categories of space, time, causality, and substance on experience, rather than passively receiving them from the world — is his celebrated Copernican Revolution. The world as we know it conforms to the structures of our cognition, not the other way around. This is at once a vindication of science and a devastating limitation of it, for it means that science gives us the world as it appears to us, not as it is in itself. The great questions of metaphysics — the existence of God, the immortality of the soul, the freedom of the will — cannot be settled by science, because they concern what lies beyond the boundaries of possible experience. In clearing this ground, Kant simultaneously honored the Enlightenment's confidence in reason and undermined its ambition to extend that confidence without remainder.

His moral philosophy attempts to rebuild on the ruins. If science cannot prove the existence of God or the freedom of the will, perhaps practical reason — the reasoning we must engage in simply to live as moral agents — can require us to presuppose them. His categorical imperative, with its demand that we act only on principles we could will to be universal laws, and its insistence that every rational being be treated as an end in itself and never merely as a

means, represents one of the most influential and contested moral proposals in the Western tradition. The lecture on Kant's ethics is careful to distinguish what he was trying to do — ground morality in reason alone, without appeal to consequences or divine command — from the difficulties that arise when we ask whether his formulation actually succeeds in ruling out the wrong things and requiring the right ones. The debates that follow in subsequent centuries — utilitarian, existentialist, communitarian — are in large part responses to the power and the problems of the Kantian moral project.

Burke's conservatism represents a different kind of response to the same crisis: not a philosophical reconstruction of ethics, but a defense of tradition, convention, and the accumulated wisdom embedded in institutions against the revolutionary pretensions of abstract reason. His Reflections on the Revolution in France, written in 1790 when the Revolution was still fashionable among English reformers, was prophetic in its insistence that dismantling inherited social structures in the name of abstract principles would produce not liberty but terror. The lecture on Burke is careful to distinguish his admiration of existing institutions from mere complacency, and his defense of prejudice — in the technical sense of the pre-rational commitments that make civilized life possible — from intellectual laziness. Burke is the father of modern conservatism not because he opposed all change, but because he insisted that the question of how change happens matters as much as what changes.

Hegel absorbs both the Kantian revolution and the lessons of historical catastrophe and produces something unprecedented: a philosophy of history that treats the entire human past as the self-unfolding of reason, working through the successive forms of national consciousness toward an ever-fuller realization of freedom. His dialectic — thesis meeting antithesis to produce synthesis — is one of those intellectual tools that, once learned, one begins to see

everywhere. His historicism, the insistence that every form of thought and value is embedded in its historical moment and cannot be judged from some timeless vantage point, is one of the most consequential and double-edged ideas of the modern era. It makes possible a new depth of historical understanding; it also threatens to make every moral judgment merely relative to its time and place. That Hegel himself deployed his system in defense of the Prussian state, finding in the present social order the rational actualization of world spirit, is one of the great cautionary tales about what happens when a philosopher becomes too comfortable with power.

Marx takes Hegel's method and turns it upside down. Where Hegel saw ideas as the motor of history, Marx sees material conditions — the forces and relations of production. The two lectures on Marx together trace both the structural argument of historical materialism and the more personal, humanistic account of alienated labor. The theory of alienation may prove more enduring than the specific predictions of historical materialism: the insight that a social and economic system can estrange human beings from their own work, their own products, their own species-nature, and from one another is one that has outlasted the particular political regimes built in Marx's name.

Mill offers the sharpest contrast to the German tradition: empirical where the Germans were idealist, consequentialist where Kant was deontological, optimistic about the possibility of social improvement through rational reform. His utilitarianism — the greatest happiness for the greatest number — combined with his passionate defense of individual liberty, made him the most influential liberal thinker of his century. The lecture is honest about the tensions in Mill's project: the difficulty of comparing the quality of different pleasures, the problem of distribution and fairness that pure aggregation cannot resolve,

and the way his mature thinking drifts toward something closer to Aristotelian virtue ethics than the clean calculus of Bentham.

Kierkegaard and Schopenhauer represent the existential and pessimistic reactions against the tide of systematic rationalism. Kierkegaard's project — making it harder, not easier, to be a Christian, in order to make genuine faith possible — is one of the strangest and most compelling in the entire tradition. His concept of the leap of faith, his account of the stages of existence, and his insistence that truth is subjectivity, that the only truth that matters for the individual is the truth embraced in passionate inwardness, anticipate the existentialism of the following century. Schopenhauer offers a darker mirror: the world as blind, striving will, with suffering as its necessary consequence, and aesthetic contemplation and finally renunciation as the only dignified responses. His debt to Kant, to Plato, and to Buddhism makes him one of the most genuinely cross-cultural figures in the Western tradition, and his influence on Nietzsche, Wagner, and Freud ensured that his pessimism would echo far beyond his own lifetime.

Nietzsche closes the part and opens the horizon that Part VI will explore. His perspectivism, his genealogy of morals, his proclamation that God is dead — not as a triumphant announcement but as a diagnosis of a cultural crisis — and his vision of self-creation as the response to that crisis, represent the point where the nineteenth century's long argument with itself reaches its most charged and unsettling formulation. He is neither nihilist nor immoralist, though he has been misread as both. He is a moralist of a peculiar kind: one who insists that the question of how to live has become, in the wake of the collapse of inherited frameworks, more urgent and more difficult than it has ever been. His Übermensch is not a master tyrant but a model of the person who has done the hard work of self-knowledge and self-shaping that genuine value-creation requires.

Together, these twelve lectures describe a century in which the confidence of the Enlightenment was tested against the realities of revolution, industrialization, and secularization, and in which every major thinker was forced to choose between rebuilding certainty on new foundations, accepting a managed uncertainty, or learning to live — and perhaps even to flourish — in its absence.

Lecture 49: Introduction to Nineteenth-Century Philosophy

Professor Darren Staloff

Overview

In this lecture, we set the groundwork for the study of philosophy in the nineteenth century — the so-called epoch of ideology. We will see that philosophy in this epoch is characterized by three distinct movements. First, the idealist movement associated with German philosophy in the first half of the century, also closely associated with the contemporary Romantic movement. Then comes the reaction against that idealism known as positivism. And finally, there is the development of existential themes.

But first it is important to examine the historical context in which this thought developed, because the nineteenth century — and by that I mean really the *long* nineteenth century, one that opens with the French Revolution and closes with the end of the century — was an epoch of dramatic transformation in both European and world history.

The Historical Context

Europe and its colonies witnessed an era of growing political unrest and turmoil as populations increasingly became politicized and publics began to express their political wills. The era opens with perhaps the most dramatic example of that publicization of politics: the French Revolution. The ensuing Napoleonic Wars, which were in fact world wars, involved all of Europe and briefly transformed the entire political and social order. Under Napoleon's sway, liberal and

parliamentary reforms and civil legislative reforms were enacted over much of Europe, destroying the remnants of the Ancien Régime and the last vestiges of the feudal order.

But that was not the end of transformation in Europe. The great powers after the fall of Napoleon tried to turn back the clock, but that project utterly failed. By 1848, nationalist and parliamentary revolutions had broken out again in Western and Central Europe, and would be followed in subsequent decades by similar movements in Southern and Eastern Europe — leading ultimately to the breakup of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the creation of the last great European nation states, Italy and Germany.

Moreover, the aftermath of the great Franco-Prussian War saw the emergence of the Paris Commune of 1871, which was the first large-scale and, although temporary, nonetheless significant socialist insurrection in European history. The long-term implication of this was that the attempt to return to dynastic monarchical government — which had been deployed by Talleyrand and Metternich with the Concert of Europe — was utterly shattered by the rise of published journals, magazines, and newspapers that espoused radical ideologies. This is one of the reasons this epoch is often known as the Age of Ideology: it is the moment when newspaper-reading publics first began to absorb doctrines like nationalism, socialism, and anarchism, as well as the less radical ideologies of liberalism and, of course, conservatism.

In addition to these internal political developments, the nineteenth century also witnessed a growing expansion and conflict between modern European nation states. Despite the attempt to achieve a concert of Europe, war nonetheless did break out between the powers. The nineteenth century was the age of empire, when Europe finally subjugated the rest of the inhabited world — from Southeast Asia to Sub-Saharan Africa — through events like the Opium Wars,

and closing with the infamous Boer War at the southern tip of Africa. Imperial superpowers formed themselves into alliances and struggled to maintain that much sought-after but ever-elusive balance of power, as illustrated by the Crimean War, in which Great Britain sought to contain Russia's incursion into what were the traditional Ottoman domains in their quest for a warm-water port.

The rise of nationalism and empire was often accompanied by violent struggle. It took a military campaign to unite Italy. In American history, the most obvious example was the development of Southern nationalism, with the tragic result being, of course, the American Civil War. In some cases, nationalism was in fact facilitated by war and violent struggle: the Austro-Prussian and Franco-Prussian wars were instrumental in the unification of Germany as a fully integrated modern nation state. In some ways, we are tempted to say that the period politically really comes to a close in the early twentieth century with the Great War — World War I — which utterly transformed the order that had emerged in the nineteenth century.

The nineteenth century was also characterized by dramatic economic and technological changes. This was the age of the great Industrial Revolution. While England had industrialized in the eighteenth century, it was really the rest of the world that industrialized in the nineteenth. With industrialization came the rise of the factory system, where for the first time people ceased to have the household as the locus of their production. Work became associated with an office or a factory, and the household became exclusively domestic — a site of family life rather than of productive labor.

The Industrial Revolution, following the commercial revolution of the previous epoch, had accelerated the expansion of urbanism, bringing with it the attendant crowding and ill health — cholera epidemics, typhus epidemics — and of course the alienation and loneliness often associated with the impersonality of the large-scale urban

center. Transportation was transformed in this period. The epoch opens with horse-drawn coaches and sailing vessels; these gave way by mid-century to steamboats and steam-powered railroads, which were in turn supplemented by the development of the internal combustion engine and the automobile in the latter part of the century. Technologies and productive processes based on steam and iron in the early nineteenth century were gradually replaced by new technologies based on fossil fuels and steel — the Bessemer process — just as agriculture and pharmacology were transformed by the development of modern chemistry and the modern chemical industry.

Cultural Conflicts

The nineteenth century was also caught in the throes of intense cultural conflicts that genuinely gripped the European mind. Europeans grappled with their modernity, struggled with its implications, and there was no small amount of ambiguity and tension. The dramatic and accelerating rate of change that the nineteenth century exposed — and particularly the rise of industrial capitalism — unleashed deep yearnings for the preservation of traditional beliefs and institutions, and gave rise to a growing sense of misgiving over the fruits of progress.

Religion in particular found itself increasingly under siege from science. In the early nineteenth century, we see the development of higher criticism, which first allowed scholars to date the Bible and identify its historical sources — to specify what the texts were and when they were crafted — and that undermined many traditional notions of the scriptures as one complete divine revelation. This was further undermined by the development of modern geology and geological time, which challenged the biblical account of creation by arguing from the fossil record that the earth must be far older than the scriptures suggest. And ultimately, of course, the greatest

challenge to religion — particularly to revealed religion — came from Darwinian evolutionary theory, which undermined the last bit of religious orthodoxy that had survived from the eighteenth century: the notion of creationism, the idea that while science may explain the workings of the world, the world itself must have been created by a divine intelligence. Darwinian evolutionary theory challenges this by showing how species could evolve simply through the struggle for survival.

Finally, traditional social roles were subject to criticism in the nineteenth century in ways far more extreme than anything seen before. Utopian radicals and practical reformers alike developed radical movements such as feminism — a nineteenth-century movement — abolitionism, racial equality, free love, pacifism, and temperance.

Philosophy in the Nineteenth Century

Given that backdrop, let us now turn to the actual development of philosophical speculation in the nineteenth century.

The Romantic Movement and German Idealism

The first phase of nineteenth-century European high culture is associated with the Romantic movement — a movement that found its greatest fruition in literature and the arts. Romantics rejected the Enlightenment as a sort of arid rationalism. They also rejected the scientism of the Enlightenment, arguing that science is not the sum and substance of human knowledge, and that there is more to the world than scientific explication alone. In that way, the Romantics were really the first moderns to self-consciously question the value of modernism and modernity itself, the first critics of the modern tradition which they had inherited.

In terms of philosophy, the most important forms of Romanticism were idealism and historicism. The critical figure in the origins of German idealism is Immanuel Kant — in many ways a transitional figure between the Enlightenment and Romanticism, a sort of Shiva figure who was both destroying the old world and creating a new one. We could summarize his goal as the effort to make science legitimate but safe for metaphysics — and in particular, for the three critical issues that Kant thought were important in metaphysics: God, freedom, and the immortality of the soul, the traditional concerns of pietistic Christians.

Kant's idealism was achieved by what he called his Copernican Revolution, which tells us that the world of our experience is organized within categories that our own minds impose. That is what we mean by idealism: the notion that our categories of the world do not correspond to natural kinds — that the world is not divided up into entities corresponding to our vocabularies — but rather the opposite: that the world as we experience it is organized under our vocabularies. Kant argued that these vocabularies, and the critical concepts that organize those categories, came from within our own minds — they were, as it were, hardwired into our brains. This argument rests on the distinction between the knowing subject and the world of objects; the world of objects had to conform to the categories of subjects, hence the Copernican Revolution, making the world of objects revolve around our minds rather than the other way around.

But this distinction in Kant's idealism gives rise to another: that between the realm of appearances — the world of objects that we perceive under those categories, which Kant called the phenomenal world, the world described by mathematical science — and the realm of being in itself, being prior to our comprehension of it under the categories of mind. Kant called this the noumenal realm, the world of

being in and of itself, which was obviously the world of metaphysics and religion. This is significant because the notion of a noumenal realm of things in themselves was critical for the development of his moral philosophy. It is only in the noumenal realm that we can find pragmatic justification to believe that our wills are in fact free, and it is only from such a pragmatic belief in the freedom of the will that the project of moral autonomy or self-legislation becomes possible. That in turn gave rise to Kant's categorical imperative and his principle of humanity, which essentially state that one should always act on maxims that one could will to be universalizable, and that one treat other people as ends and never merely as means.

That formulation of the categorical imperative and the principle of humanity is a self-conscious rejection of the consequentialism and social Epicureanism that characterized the Enlightenment, particularly in figures like Mandeville, Hume, and Smith. It rejected such consequentialism in favor of a duty-based, or deontological, interpretation of moral theory.

Schopenhauer was profoundly influenced by Kant, as he was by Plato and by the philosophy of the Indian subcontinent, and he shared Kant's idealism. But Schopenhauer combined it with a profoundly pessimistic metaphysical posture. In many ways, Schopenhauer's work represents the rehabilitation of speculative metaphysics in the aftermath of the critique of scientific naturalism that Kant had made possible. Schopenhauer's notion of the world as representation is an obvious reference to Kant's realm of the phenomenal, while his notion of the world as will is meant to coincide with the noumenal realm of Kant's things in themselves. Similarly, his principle of sufficient reason is intensely anti-scientific, as it attempts to explain the apparently but obviously merely superficial success of modern science in explaining natural phenomena. It is in fact reminiscent of the entire Platonic quest to find the real world that lies behind or

beyond the veil of appearances we examine in everyday life and in natural science.

His Eastern-inspired ethic of renunciation — the very source of his pessimism — is an obvious rejection of the modern Enlightenment cult of progress, aspiration, and striving. To argue that the best solution to the human condition is to cease to strive is to reject the whole cult of technological, scientific, social, and mathematical progress; it is to suggest that such striving is the problem and never the solution.

Hegel and Historicism

At this point we turn to probably the most important figure in the development of German idealism: G. W. F. Hegel. Hegel added what I think was the critical element that made idealism the profoundly important philosophy it has remained to this day, namely historicism. Hegel's historicism — his belief and argument that each historical epoch is distinct and different, that cultures are really relative to their historical epochs, as are values and epistemological structures — represents the culmination of German idealism. His dialectical mode of reasoning and overarching historicism gave that idealism a logical structure and historical implications that would give it traction all the way up to the present.

Now, Hegel's use of historicism was obviously conservative and it did have precursors. We are tempted to look, both in the eighteenth century and late seventeenth century, to Vico, and in our own period of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries to Edmund Burke. Both had stressed the importance of tradition over speculative and utopian reason, and Burke in particular often privileged sentiment over science. Within the German-speaking world, there were of course other important precursors of his interpretation of national cultures, specifically Fichte and Herder.

What Hegel did with the Kantian scheme was to historicize Kant's insight by arguing that those conceptual schemes that Kant had argued were hardwired into our brains are actually evolving aspects of culture that vary with time and place — that the conceptual categories of mind are in fact a result of the world spirit developing and transforming itself through history.

Hegel's philosophy of history, and in particular his doctrine that the rational is the real and the real is the rational, is intensely conservative in its implications. Precisely because if the rational is the real and the real is the rational, then that which exists is justifiable by the development of history, and whatever history has developed must therefore be as rational as present circumstances allow. But it was also quite statist and nationalist, because the world spirit acted through national spirits, and the highest form of national spirit was embodied in the state. Since national spirits evolve in a dialectical struggle with each other, the most obvious way in which they resolve their antitheses is through war — and for that reason, Hegel's philosophy had intensely militaristic implications. It was for these reasons that Hegel became the court philosopher of the Prussian regime.

But Hegel's idealism, while intended to be conservative, nonetheless had intensely relativistic implications. Precisely because there is no extra-historicist standpoint from which one can judge a particular philosophical or moral position, one is reduced to judging moral positions from within the traditions in which they arise. And since Hegel's idealism claims to be a higher and more certain form of knowledge, it is also, like Schopenhauer's doctrines, in its own way quite anti-scientific — precisely because Hegelian historicist idealism claims to be more certain than merely empirical science.

Positivism

By the middle of the century, a reaction against this sort of philosophical Romanticism had set in, and that movement is known as positivism. Positivism shared many features of the Enlightenment — its quest for practical rather than speculative knowledge, and its belief in progress — but more than anything, it shared the Enlightenment's commitment to science: science as both a rational method of inquiry and as a quintessentially humanistic endeavor, a means by which humanity comes to understand itself and to master the world.

Marx and Historical Materialism

Marx's historical materialism is in many ways one of the best examples of positivism. It sought to incorporate Hegel's historicism within a naturalistic and scientific worldview, and it is critical to keep in mind that Marx's account of historical change and development was meant to be scientific. His analysis of history is empirically grounded and begins with the biological needs of humans to supply their material wants. For Marx, history is driven by our productive rather than idealistic urges, and the real motor of history ultimately turns out to be scientific and technological advances.

Marx's reductionism turns Hegelianism on its head. Hegel had argued that philosophy, religion, and art form the ideal basis of all societies and cultures. But Marx argued quite the contrary: that the basic structure of society is its economy and its productive forces, and that art, philosophy, and religion are simply superstructural epiphenomena, created to justify, regularize, and express the values of that economic base.

Marx's demand for the unity of theory and practice obviously radicalized historicism, turning it away from its conservative implications and making it a radical endeavor. His own theory in

many ways exemplifies a sort of evolutionary humanism. Nonetheless, Marxist thought still retains certain Romantic residues. His critique of alienation is quite similar to what one finds in Carlyle and other Romantics. And his vision of communism is in many ways extremely Kantian: the scientific age of prehistory that ends with the development of communism marks the closure of Kantian heteronomy, and the emergence of communism is really the Kantian age of autonomy — the age when mankind constitutes a kingdom of ends.

Mill and Utilitarianism

Another version of positivism is Mill's utilitarianism. The difference between it and Marx is that Mill draws on the Anglophone empiricist tradition rather than the German Hegelian tradition. The roots of Mill's thought lie in previous English-speaking consequentialists like Bernard Mandeville, David Hume, Hume's friend Adam Smith, and obviously the founder of utilitarianism, Jeremy Bentham. Its influences would run all the way into the twentieth century with figures like William James and our contemporary John Rawls.

Utilitarianism's philosophical calculus is clearly an empirically grounded moral theory. Its quantitative orientation is meant to demonstrate its status as a scientific morality. And Mill's claim to argue for the desirability of happiness from the fact that it is desired is further evidence of its empirical orientation. Mill's consequentialism is thoroughly naturalistic and materialistic in its formulation — if you read Mill, you will find no mention of God or duty in any of his moral writings; everything is based on purely measurable and quantifiable psychological and social realities. The rational calculation behind utilitarianism and its consequentialism both appeal to and express a middle-class ethos — an ethos based on the rational calculation of profits and losses and of family budgets.

Existential Themes

The final and third phase of nineteenth-century thought witnessed the rise of existential themes and issues that would play out quite profoundly in the twentieth century. The most notable of these was how to discern the meaning and significance of the life of the individual in a secular and particularly in a post-Darwinian age.

Kierkegaard

Søren Kierkegaard stressed the conflict between faith and reason, doing so in order to highlight the psychological transformations implicated in faith and to examine the very nature of faith itself. In this way, Kierkegaard is a fideist — one who stresses the importance of faith over reason. His fideism echoes that of earlier critics of rational or natural religion, like Bayle and Pascal, both of whom had shared his commitment to a notion of religion based not on creedal certainty or rational theology, but on a blind leap of faith. His concern with the life of the individual in its alienated state harks back in some ways to Marx, and certainly prefigures the thought of more subsequent existentialists — there are similarities with Nietzsche, but also with Sartre and Camus.

The primacy of willing and deciding in Kierkegaard's thought — in overcoming what he called *Angst*, or anxiety — presupposes a freedom of the will. One cannot formulate that project without believing that the will is somehow not determined, and such a belief in the freedom of the will contradicts the determinism that is the very nature of positivistic materialism. The very structure of Kierkegaard's thought is therefore a violation, transgression, and rejection of scientific naturalism. Similarly, his concern with subjective truth as the highest and most important truth for the existential issues that face us is clearly antithetical to the scientific quest for objectivity. We

find in Kierkegaard an embrace of subjectivity against objectivity. Indeed, the cool calculus of utilities we find in Mill seems petty and insignificant in contrast to the dramatic fear and trembling that Kierkegaard celebrates as the core of true — Abrahamic — faith.

Nietzsche

Friedrich Nietzsche shared many of Kierkegaard's concerns with the alienation and spiritual impoverishment of modern man, and he stressed the same conflict between faith and reason. Unlike Kierkegaard, however, Nietzsche was a naturalist, and his perspectivism combined idealism with a historicist pluralism. The doctrine that "there are no facts, only interpretations" expresses the essential anti-realism and idealism of Nietzsche: those Hegelian, historicized categories of mind are not in fact evolving toward anything — they simply change one after another with no significant structure and no *telos*, nature having no purpose. This suggests his deep commitment to a Heraclitean sense of flux or chaos as the very structure of the universe: blind chance and fortune moving through time and space.

The end of the cult of objectivity — an objectivity that is moral as well as metaphysical and scientific — is summarized in his famous aphorism, "God is dead." God being the source of all of our certainties, all of our fixities. Once God is dead, there are no more fixities in science, in metaphysics, or in morality. While Nietzsche embraces science, he argues that science does not get to the bottom of things — it is rather like an onion: one peels off one layer of explanation only to find another layer, until one finally reaches the end and finds there is nothing there at all.

Nietzsche practiced a historicist and naturalistic critique of morality — one with profound implications not only for German culture but for Western culture in general. He did this by applying techniques drawn from both Hegel and Marx to understanding what he called

the *genealogy* of morality. He saw morality as historicist, as essentially relative to its circumstances — in that sense he is Hegelian. But like Marx, he saw the key to morality hinging on social class. The moral philosophy of the ancient Greeks and Romans was thus the philosophy — or moral will to power — of the elite, of the masters, while Christianity and its ethos was the will to power of their subjugated slaves.

Instead of Kierkegaard's leap of faith, Nietzsche sought self-creation as a project. *Authenticity* is the phrase often used today; the essential project was that each individual — since there is no real self, his anti-realism being internal as well as external — must create himself. Each individual must be, in a sense, an artist, and hence aesthetic issues become central to his moral thought.

Nietzsche rejected Schopenhauer's pessimism. Profoundly influenced by Schopenhauer though he was, he rejected that pessimism in favor of a Promethean, or Dionysian, yea-saying toward life — a ruthless embrace of life as expressed in his famous doctrine of the eternal return: that if you were forced to live your whole life over and over again, with all of its absurdities and embarrassments, you should say *yes* — you would embrace it even with all its tragedies.

Conclusion: Toward Pragmatism

Nietzsche's perspectivism is informed by his naturalism, his humanism, and his commitment to evolutionary perspectives. All of these features would be shared by subsequent thinkers. I would like to close this lecture by noting the influence of Nietzsche's fusion of Hegel, Marx, and Kant, and the way it would play itself out in the great American tradition of pragmatism, which we will examine in the work of James, Dewey, Quine, and Rorty.

Lecture 50: Kant's Copernican Revolution

Professor Robert Kane

Among present-day philosophers, Immanuel Kant is considered one of the greatest, if not *the* greatest, of modern philosophers. He has certainly had as much influence on modern thought as any other thinker. In addition, Kant is one of the most important representatives of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment in Western philosophy and Western thought. His life spanned nearly the whole of the eighteenth century, from his birth in 1724 until his death in 1804. Kant was imbued with the ideals of the Enlightenment: the importance it placed on reason and science, on thinking for oneself, its distrust of authoritarianism and superstition, and the importance of freedom, autonomy, and the dignity of the individual. All of these things meant a tremendous amount to Kant.

And yet there is a curious irony about Kant's thought, for his celebrated *Critique of Pure Reason* tended to undermine many of these very ideals of the Enlightenment — the very beliefs that he himself wanted to believe in. As a consequence, the twentieth-century theologian Paul Tillich referred to Kant as a Shiva figure of the Enlightenment. You may recall that Shiva is the Hindu god who is both creator and destroyer of the universe. In Hindu art and sculpture, Shiva — the many-armed one, with one leg raised — is shown dancing while one cosmic epic comes to an end and a new one is created. And so it was with Kant and the Enlightenment, Tillich says: his philosophy expressed some of its highest ideals, and yet, by showing the limitations of human reason and science, that same philosophy undercut the traditional foundations of Enlightenment faith. This was Kant the destroyer of the old intellectual order, as he had also been, in a way, its completer. In this vein, the German poet Heinrich Heine said that this little man from Königsberg aroused

more terror in Europe than all the minions of terrorists like Robespierre and others. Kant was also known by the German nickname *der Alleszermalmende* — the all-crusher, the one who destroys everything.

But like the Shiva figure he was, Kant also turned around and tried to reconstruct Enlightenment ideals on a new basis — some new faith that he could create. He said in a famous passage, in fact, that his whole aim was to deny reason in order to make room for faith. This was Kant the creator of a new intellectual order, whose work became the baseline for many of the ideas and directions that philosophical thought took in the later nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

In these next two lectures, we will look at both sides of Kant's thought. In this lecture, we examine Kant the completer and destroyer of modern rationality, as expressed in his great work *The Critique of Pure Reason*, and this will involve us in the notion of Kant's Copernican Revolution in philosophy — a term I will explain as we go along. In the next lecture, we will turn to Kant's attempts to rebuild the Enlightenment faith on new foundations of practical reason, especially in the areas of ethics and values, but also in religion and politics.

Kant the Man

Now, who was this figure who had such a profound impact on modern thought? He was a little man of regular habits who scarcely ever left Königsberg in East Prussia, where he was a professor. Kant grew up in a pietistic German home that emphasized stern moral conscience, control of the passions, and religious piety. His father was a harness maker, but Kant was so notoriously clumsy with his hands that he was not much of a craftsman — much to his father's distress. But he was a bright young man, so he did the next best

thing: he became a philosopher. Kant's father taught him to be industrious and upright, never to tell lies — a lasting influence, as we will see.

Kant especially recorded one incident from the life of his family. There was a serious labor dispute between the Harness Makers' Guild and the Saddle Makers' Guild — something a little unfamiliar to us today, but we all know about labor disputes, and this was apparently a very serious one. Kant records that throughout this terrible dispute, his parents — both his mother and father — conducted themselves with, and I quote, "such forbearance and love and honesty to their opponents during this heated labor conflict" that Kant says the thought of it, though he was only a little boy, would never leave him. It was a lesson in learning morals and virtue by example, which is ultimately the only really effective way to teach them.

But Kant's mother was by far and away the greatest influence on his life. She had a great deal of imagination and encouraged his intellectual interests, teaching him about nature and the starry heavens. Kant reflects her influence when, in a famous passage of his *Critique of Practical Reason*, he writes: "Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing awe and admiration: the starry heavens above us and the moral law within us." Kant's mother died when he was only thirteen — undoubtedly the most profound incident in his life, one that had a tremendous impact on his later thought. But these two things she had taught him to wonder about — the starry heavens above and the moral law within — stayed with him throughout his life and played a huge role in his philosophy.

This pietistic background and belief in God and morality stayed with Kant throughout his life. But as a true representative of the Enlightenment, Kant was also convinced that religion and morality could not be based merely on external authority — as they were, of course, for his parents and other pious believers of his time — since

we have to choose on the basis of our own reason which authority we will accept and which we will reject. Kant had in fact written a brilliant little essay called *What Is Enlightenment?*, in which he summed up many of the ideas of the Enlightenment. He said that the nature of Enlightenment was overcoming the tutelage of childhood, in which we blindly accept the authority of others, and learning to think for ourselves. Thus the motto of the Enlightenment, he said, was *sapere aude* — Latin for "dare to know," dare to think for yourself and reason things out in your own way.

The Problem: The Limits of Reason

But by Kant's time, the course of modern thought was beginning to show some cracks in the edifice of human reason. Reason had great successes in science and in understanding the starry heavens above us — one half of his mother's legacy, as you may recall. But it had sown confusion and skepticism when it came to questions of value, religion, and ethics — the moral law within us.

Kant was greatly stirred by this problem, and he was awakened to it by many of the modern thinkers who had preceded him, but especially by the Scottish philosopher David Hume. In a famous passage, Kant said that Hume had awakened him from his so-called "dogmatic slumber." The dogmatic slumber Kant is referring to is the naïve faith of many Enlightenment thinkers that the successes of modern science — the successes of Copernicus and Galileo and Newton and all the other great thinkers who had transformed our understanding of the physical world prior to Kant's time — would be extended beyond science to the great questions of philosophy itself, so that human reason would someday be able to unlock the secrets of metaphysics as it had unlocked the secrets of the physical world.

But Hume's empiricism and skepticism — about the existence of God, about the nature of causation in the natural world, about the persistence of the self or the soul — all these things, which Hume had questioned with very powerful reasoning, brought home to Kant the idea that extending the successes of science and mathematics to the rest of the major questions of life — the questions of philosophy and metaphysics — was not going to be easy. Hume, after all, is another one of the greatest and most influential of modern philosophers.

And so Kant set out to understand why there was this sharp break between how much we could succeed in doing over here in science, and how little progress we seemed to be making over here in the realm of philosophy and metaphysics.

The Critique of Pure Reason: The Central Question

In his great work *The Critique of Pure Reason*, published in 1781 when Kant was the quite mature age of fifty-seven, Kant asked a fundamental question for the modern age: why is modern science, together with mathematics, so successful in giving us objective knowledge of the physical world, while we find it so hard to attain such knowledge and agreement in the area of metaphysics — that which goes beyond physics — about the soul, about God, about free will and morality?

And Kant's answer to this seminal question was just as challenging to the modern world as the question itself. He said that modern science and mathematics were so spectacularly successful because they deal only with the way things *appear to us*, not with the way things really are in themselves. They deal only with what Kant called the *phenomenal* world — the world of appearances. The big questions of metaphysics and the good, by contrast, concern things as they are in

themselves — what Kant called the *noumenal* world, after the Greek word for pure reason, *nous*.

The world studied by science, in other words, is the world that can be experienced through our senses. And in order to be able to experience that world, we impose on it — like a kind of grid — certain forms and categories of the human mind that make experience possible. As a result, science gives us a world as it appears to us, not as it is in itself.

Space, Time, and the Forms of Intuition

Take space and time, for example. Is it any accident that everything science can deal with exists in space and time? No, says Kant, because space and time are general forms of the human mind that make experience of the world possible in the first place. Space is not like a large box we peer into, according to Kant. It is rather a projection of our own consciousness, which makes it possible to experience objects out there in the world at all. And without time, there could be no experience either. To experience something is to go through it or undergo it, as we say. And there could be no such undergoing — no such going through — without time. Something timeless may be a thought or an idea, but it cannot be an experience.

Space and time, then, are two forms of the human mind that all experiences must conform to simply in order to be experiences. Kant calls them *forms of intuition*, or *forms of sensibility*. We do not get the ideas of space and time from experience, because we must presuppose them in order to have experience in the first place. This is what Kant means by calling space and time *a priori* forms of intuition — the Latin *a priori* meaning "from the first" or "from the beginning." We must have them — space and time — already in our mental arsenal from the beginning in order to experience a world at

all. It is as if Kant started up his gospel by saying: "In the beginning were the forms of intuition and the categories of experience."

That is also why Kant reasons we can arrive at necessary truths and proofs in mathematics and geometry — because they are about the very forms that are necessary for all of our experience. Geometry, he thought, was about space. Arithmetic, more interestingly, he thought was about time, since he believed the number series arose from our experience of time — one, two, three, four, and so on. So the truths of arithmetic and Euclidean geometry were, for Kant, what he called *synthetic a priori* truths. The *a priori* element we already understand: they come first and are part of the structure of our categories, which we impose on the world, so they are there from the beginning and we do not derive them from experience. What *synthetic* means is that these truths — the truths of geometry and mathematics — are not merely true by the meanings of the words alone. They are about something real out there in the world, and we do not know their truth merely by understanding definitions. So they are about something real, and yet they also come before experience.

We know today, of course, that Kant was wrong to assume that Euclidean geometry — the only geometry he knew — was the ultimate truth about the nature of space, as though our forms of mind were Euclidean in character, as he thought. And he was also wrong to think that Newton's physics was the last word in physical theory. Kant jumped the gun on these matters, to be sure.

And yet his idea of geometrical knowledge as grounded in spatial intuition contained a grain of truth. For even when we nowadays imagine non-Euclidean geometries — for example, when we imagine Riemannian or spherical geometry, as if the structure of space were on the surface of a sphere rather than being flat, as in Euclidean geometry — we still have to imagine it *in space*. We imagine that space is like a three-dimensional layer on a four-dimensional sphere.

So Kant seems to be right, after all, that geometry, arithmetic, and mathematics in general are based largely on spatial imagination. We have heard recently that Einstein, for example, had in his brain an extra-large portion devoted to spatial-visual imagination, and apparently that had a great deal to do with his tremendous insights and abilities in physics.

The Copernican Revolution

Kant's account of space and time also provides us with the first clue to the meaning of his well-known Copernican Revolution — Kant's own term for his philosophy. The idea is that the human mind is the source of the forms of intuition and the basic categories in terms of which we see the world. Those categories and forms come from *us*, and we impose them on the world — they are not imposed on us by the world from the outside. Forms of intuition and categories of the mind are *a priori*; they come before all experience. They are not *a posteriori* — they do not come after experience, nor are they derived from it.

This is the Copernican Revolution. In effect, Kant inverted the order of knowledge as Copernicus had inverted the order of the sun and the earth in cosmology. Instead of thinking that the ideas and forms by which we understand the world are imposed on us from the outside world through experience, we impose them on that world. Kant was here overcoming some of the views he had inherited from the preceding two centuries of modern philosophy. It was John Locke who said that the mind is a blank slate and that the world imposes ideas and categories upon it. Kant turns that all around: the basic ideas do not come from the world — we impose them on the world itself. So, as Copernicus had displaced humans from the center

of the physical universe, Kant put them back into the center as regards our *knowledge* of that universe.

The Categories of Understanding

Kant does not make this claim only for space and time. In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, he goes on to argue that there are also categories of thought that must be *a priori* components of our thinking and must be imposed on the world of experience. There are twelve such categories in Kant's system, but we will focus on a few to illustrate what he is getting at.

First is the idea of *substance* — the idea that there are persistent things in the world, like rocks and stars and trees and human beings. We see the world as containing persisting things; things do not simply flicker past us. *Causality* is another category — the idea that some things necessarily produce other things and bring them about; without that, how could we understand a world? *Plurality* is yet another: the world contains a plurality of different kinds of objects. *Unity* is another: these objects nevertheless share common traits that make it possible for us to formulate ideas and laws about them. And finally, *existence*: we assume that some things in our experience exist independently of that experience — that the room would still be here when we left it — and we assume that as a basic condition of experience.

Now, scholars have been quite critical of the rigidity of Kant's list, partly because he arrived at it in a somewhat artificial way, by reverting to the modes of Aristotelian and medieval logic. So there is a degree of arbitrariness to the list that scholars have rightly criticized. But the general idea of these categories being applied to the world is an enormously important one, because it does appear that we could not experience the world at all without them.

Some of the criticisms of Kant in modern philosophy have to do precisely with the fact that his thought was limited by the horizons of his own time. He assumed Euclidean geometry was true, he assumed Newton's physics was true, and he assumed that Aristotelian and medieval logic was the final word on logic. Newton has since been overthrown by Einstein; we now have different geometries; and logic in the twentieth century has expanded to include a great many forms beyond those of Aristotle. None of this, however, necessarily undermines Kant's Copernican Revolution itself, for it may still very well be that some basic set of categories — substance, causality, plurality, unity, existence — is needed to make our experience at all coherent and intelligible.

The Transcendental Deduction of the Categories

Yet Kant is not content merely to point out that we apply these categories to the world. He wants to argue that we could never even experience a world at all if we did not apply them — he must show that they are *necessary*. And that is very hard to do. In the case of space and time, the argument is fairly easy: how could we have experience through our senses without space and without time? But with the categories, it is a little more difficult.

In order to argue that they are necessary, Kant constructs a very complicated argument in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, known by the rather forbidding title "the Transcendental Deduction of the Categories." This is one of those phrases Kant used that makes his philosophy even more difficult than it would ordinarily be. But I think we can understand the basic idea in a relatively accessible way — scholars have argued about it for centuries and offered many different interpretations, but I would like to offer a clue as to how it might work.

Remember, Kant has to show that categories like substance and causality are absolutely essential to our experience. Now, here is the clue: when Kant says these categories are necessary to experience, he means necessary to having an *objective* experience, not merely a *subjective* one. And by objective experience, he almost always means an experience of distinct objects out there in the world.

Here is an example. Suppose someone places before us an array of photographs taken at a crime scene. In the first photograph, a man is approaching a warehouse carrying a can of gasoline. The next picture shows him closer. Then he reaches the door and opens it. Another picture shows him inside, opening the can. Another shows him pouring the liquid on the floor. Another: he lights a match. And then, wham, we see pictures of the warehouse burning and fire trucks arriving. But all we have is an array of pictures.

What our mind does with these pictures, of course, is to construct a coherent story. The man deliberately burned down the warehouse, we say — if we are in a courtroom and are shown these pictures, we fill in the blanks. But suppose someone were to say that the pictures tell no objective story at all. They are just a bunch of colored blotches on a series of pieces of film. The rest is all our imagination — we made it up. There was no man, no warehouse, no fire. There were just light and dark patches on pieces of paper, not really representing anything, as if they had arrived there more or less by accident — like an expressionist painting created by throwing paint cans at a canvas that might happen, by accident, to look like voluminous Aunt Sally after she has had five cans of beer, but which is not really meant to represent anything at all.

Philosophers prior to Kant, like Bishop Berkeley, had worried about something like this: everything might just be an idea in our minds — wholly subjective, with no real objects out there in the world. But Kant thinks he has an answer to this troubling worry. The twentieth-

century philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein once said that in order to solve the problems of philosophy, you have to learn to think even more crazily than the philosophers do — and I think that is indeed true. And that is what Kant does here.

His point is this: if our minds did not impose the categories of substance and causality, unity, plurality, and existence on those pictures, there would be no coherent story to tell about the warehouse fire — or about anything else in the world. The categories are necessary for there to be an objective experience at all. We have to impose them on the data in order to get a coherent story of things. We have to say that that is a man who actually walked continuously toward the warehouse — that it was the same man inside as had been outside; that is *substance*, a persistent thing. And there is causality: pouring the gasoline on the floor and lighting that match actually caused the fire. To tell a coherent story, we must use these categories of substance and causality, and we must suppose that there is an independent reality there with a coherence to it — not just a bunch of blotches and pixels that mean nothing at all. That, I think, is the essence of Kant's Transcendental Deduction: in order to have an objective experience at all, we must impose these categories in order to tell a coherent story.

Now, you might say it still might be a *subjective* story we are telling, because perhaps the story told by our categories is idiosyncratic — maybe it is just our story, and someone else would tell a different story, in which case there would be no objective world we were really describing. But Kant says no. That would be true if the categories and forms of intuition we imposed on the world were different for each person. But Kant's view is that these forms — space and time, substance and causality and the rest — are *universal*. We all have them, and they are the same in all of us. So the story we tell, if we get it right, should be the same for everyone. That is what objectivity

really means: either your story about the fire and mine are at odds, and one of us is wrong, or else we are going to tell the same story. Without the categories, there would be no coherent story at all — and that is the idea behind his Transcendental Deduction.

The Limits of Knowledge and the Destruction of Enlightenment Faith

We are now in a position to return to the seminal question with which Kant began the *Critique of Pure Reason*: how is it that science and mathematics are so successful in giving us objective knowledge of the world, while we cannot achieve similar objective knowledge and agreement in matters of philosophy or metaphysics — concerning God, the soul, freedom, and values?

The answer is that science and mathematics stay within the bounds of our experience, which are defined by the forms of space and time and the categories of the understanding. Mathematics can arrive at necessary conclusions because it is about the necessary forms — space and time — of our understanding. And science deals with the interactions and laws governing the behavior of things through causality, substance, and so on. But these very strengths of science and mathematics are also the sources of their limitations: they give us only the world as we experience it through our senses, not as it really is in itself.

And yet Kant felt that we also have a deep need to know things beyond the mere physical world. We have a metaphysical urge — we want to know about free will, about God, about the self. In the final part of the *Critique*, he raises the question of the limitations of our knowledge in these regards. About the soul and its supposed immortality, he says: we have experience and consciousness of our continuing self, but science cannot prove there is a soul; it lies

beyond our experience. If anything, we would have to take it on faith. But science can never prove it and never will. Here again we see the idea of limiting reason in order to make room for faith.

Furthermore, when we try to think about the cosmos metaphysically, we run into what Kant calls *antinomies* — contradictions. Did the universe have a beginning in time? One can construct a proof that it did. Did it not have a beginning in time? One can construct a proof that it did not. These antinomies show the limitations of our reason in understanding such things. Similarly, free will goes beyond our experience, even though our inner consciousness tells us we have it. And as for God — Kant finds severe limitations in every attempt to prove God's existence: if we must believe in God, we would have to do so on the basis of practical reason, not scientific demonstration.

There, then, is Kant as the destroyer of Enlightenment faith. In the next lecture, however, we will see Kant turn around and try to say something positive about these great ideas — ethics, values, free will, God, and the soul. He believes we can access them in another way, through practical reason. Let us see how he does that in the next lecture.

Lecture 51: Kant's Moral Theory

Professor Robert Kane

In the previous lecture, I referred to Kant as a Shiva figure of the Enlightenment — like the Hindu god Shiva, whose dance brought an end to one cosmic epic and gave rise to another. Kant brought to an end, and in a way completed, one cosmic epic in the modern era of intellectual thought, and in a way created a new one. In the last lecture, we looked at the sense in which he was something of a completer of Enlightenment ideals, but also a destroyer of them by undermining the Enlightenment faith in reason and science. In this lecture, we want to look further at Kant's later works, in which he tried to reconstruct things again — and in which he became, if you will, the creator of a new intellectual order.

If he had stopped with the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant's contribution to the ancient quest for wisdom would have been wholly negative, and many of his contemporaries in fact took it to be so. But Kant himself wanted to go on and discuss the questions of metaphysics, ethics, and values — the things that matter to most people. If these questions of metaphysics and philosophy could not be answered and accessed by science or theoretical reason, then perhaps, he thought, they could be accessed in another way: by *practical reason*, that is, reasoning about how we live and how we act.

By such an indirect route through practical reason, Kant also thought he might be able to vindicate some of the great ideals of the Enlightenment — the dignity of the individual, the universal rights to life and liberty, and so on — which he himself so admired and cared about. If theoretical reason and science could not vindicate these,

then perhaps through practical reasoning, through the way we think about our everyday lives, we could find some access to them.

So, echoing in a way what he had learned at his mother's knee — those two things worthy of admiration, the starry heavens above us and the moral law within us — he observed that science had told us about the starry heavens above. But if we were going to understand the great questions of life, we would have to look at the other side: the moral law within us. That, Kant thought, was where we ought to begin our thinking about the great questions of metaphysics and philosophy.

If we could show, for example, that through practical reasoning we were compelled to suppose a moral law, and also a free will by which we could act morally or not, then we might have reason to believe in these things even if science could not prove them to us. In that way, we might vindicate some of the Enlightenment's ideals about human beings, and we might also get some clues, Kant thought, to the great questions about the human soul, God, and our ultimate destiny. Such was Kant's project in his ethical works written after the *Critique of Pure Reason* — works like the *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals* and the *Critique of Practical Reason*.

Hypothetical and Categorical Imperatives

To access these questions through practical reason, however, Kant thought we had to get beyond our individual desires and purposes. We had, so to speak, to expand our vision beyond our narrow, selfish interests — beyond our own limited perspective. Practical reason is concerned with how we ought to live. But the concern, he thought, could not merely be about our own particular everyday interests. It could not be a matter of how we ought to live *if* we wanted or desired this or that particular thing, because human beings have

different desires and purposes. We do not all desire the same things, and that would not give us the universality of perspective that metaphysical and philosophical questions require.

Kant expressed this important point in the following way. He said that most of our everyday concerns, when we reason practically, have to do with what he called *hypothetical imperatives* — oughts with an "if" in them. If you want to stay healthy, you ought to eat right and exercise. If you want others to trust you, you ought to tell the truth. If you want to become a doctor or a lawyer, you ought to study. We tell our children these practical maxims constantly, and everyday life is made up of them.

Nowadays, they can get pretty confusing. We were told for a time that you couldn't eat chocolate, and now it appears that chocolate contains antioxidants which are very good for you. I have friends eating all the chocolate they can until the next study comes along telling them it is no good for them again.

Now, these hypothetical imperatives, though they are the stuff of everyday life, apply only to those who happen to have the particular wants or desires in question. And the desires of people may differ — and may even be evil. "If you want to be a good terrorist, you ought to learn how to make bombs" is just as valid a hypothetical imperative, in its logical form, as any other. So by contrast, ethics or morality cannot be represented by hypothetical imperatives alone. They are more practical than they are ethical or moral, because they always have an "if" in them in this way.

What we want for ethics is some idea of *duty* — what everyone ought to do, period. No ifs, ands, or buts, regardless of one's particular purposes or desires. This would give us the universality Kant is after. He calls such imperatives *categorical imperatives*, to distinguish them from hypothetical ones. For instance, a categorical

imperative would say: "Don't lie. Period." Not "don't lie if you want to be trusted by others" — that would be a practical, everyday, hypothetical imperative. Rather, categorically: don't lie; it is wrong. That concept is what our idea of duty is all about. It is about categorical claims of this kind. And such an imperative would be universal, or absolute: it would apply to everyone, no matter what their particular desires or purposes, because there is no "if" in it — no condition, no qualification. So far, so good.

That is what we are looking for when we want to ground morality or ethics on new foundations. But what, Kant asks, could motivate us to adopt such a categorical imperative, since doing so cannot depend on any of our desires, purposes, individual needs, or wants? What could a law be like that made no reference whatsoever to desires of this kind — or indeed to consequences? Since the categorical imperative would declare something right or wrong regardless of what consequences it might lead to, it must be right or wrong *in itself*. Kant was looking for something like, in ethics, the thing in itself: what is right or wrong in itself — just as in his discussion of science he had been looking for things as they are in themselves, in the noumenal world.

And Kant's answer to this question — what this law, this categorical imperative, could possibly be based on — is given in his own words: "Since I have robbed the will of every inducement that might arise as a consequence of obeying any particular desire or purpose… nothing is left to ground this imperative but the conformity of actions to universal law as such. And this alone must serve the will as its principle." That is to say: I ought never to act except in such a way that I can also will that my maxim should become a universal law — a law for everyone to follow.

In other words, if you want to get beyond your own personal or selfish desires, you should think of yourself as legislating action for

everyone. Then the law you arrived at would be universal, not just for yourself. This yields Kant's famous categorical imperative: *Act only on that maxim through which you can will at the same time that it should become a universal law* — a law for everyone to follow, not just yourself.

Understanding the Categorical Imperative

Now, you may feel you have missed a step somewhere in how Kant arrived at this very famous imperative. If so, join the club. Philosophers have pondered this argument perhaps more than any other in modern ethics, and they disagree considerably about what it is. I want to suggest some clues as to how we might go about understanding it.

First, Kant is well aware that in the past, most people have grounded ethics or morality upon the authoritative commands of God or religion of some kind. That is where most of us have learned our morality and our ideas about ethics — from religious training in one form or another. Kant knows that full well; it is also where he learned it. But as a true representative of the Enlightenment, he no longer believed that morality could be based on mere external authority. It could not be based on what he called *heteronomy* — law from somebody or something else — since we had to choose, through our own reason, which authority to accept and whether to accept any authority at all. This was as true of our belief in morality as of our belief in God. The source had to be our own autonomous reason, as Kant put it. "Think for yourself," you will recall, was the motto of the Enlightenment as he had described it.

And since there was no scientific or theoretical proof of these matters concerning God and morality, we had to fall back on practical reason for clues. How to proceed, therefore?

Here is my attempt to explain what Kant is doing in reasoning to his categorical imperative. When we exercise our practical reason, Kant is saying, we are legislating for ourselves — we are acting as self-legislators, giving laws or oughts to ourselves. In most everyday cases, we legislate hypothetically: if you want this, or if you have this purpose, then you ought to do such and such. But that is not quite complete self-legislation as Kant understands it, because we are acting merely hypothetically and merely for ourselves.

But suppose we wanted to legislate universally the right thing to do for all persons. Suppose we wanted to expand our vision so as to find some way of legislating morality — some ways of living that went beyond our own personal, subjective, or relative ways of doing things, in order to arrive at some universal or necessary truths about what was good or right for everyone.

To do this, Kant is suggesting, we would have to be willing to rise above all of our particular desires and purposes, our selfish ways of life, and be willing to legislate universally for everyone — not just hypothetically for ourselves. We would have to be willing to become something like a universal judge, a King Solomon, so to speak, willing to put aside our selfish desires and purposes in order to wisely legislate for all. We would then have to adopt principles of action that could apply to everyone, not just to ourselves. But this amounts to Kant's categorical imperative: act only on that maxim through which you can will that it become a universal law for everyone to follow, not just yourself.

We have to think of Kant, in the realm of morality and practical reasoning, as projecting ourselves beyond our own narrow and limited visions — of our world, our society, our culture, our personal tastes — in order to find something universal in the realm of values and ethics. This is not unlike what one does in science: in order to find out what is objectively and universally true about the physical

universe, one has to overcome one's own limited vision and biases, and somehow discover laws that apply to all. Kant is suggesting we do the same with regard to values and ethics. If we are similarly in need of overcoming a narrowness of vision, the remedy is to expand it: don't just legislate selfishly for yourself; try to legislate for everybody, and then you will arrive at laws that apply to everyone. There is a parallelism, he believes, between how we should proceed in practical reasoning and how we proceed in theoretical reasoning.

Of course, Kant emphasizes that only rational beings can do this — can imaginatively place themselves above their own particular desires and purposes and thereby rise above their physical and biological nature. Only by the exercise of human reason can we attain such a perspective, and thereby separate ourselves from the beasts.

The Categorical Imperative in Practice: Examples and Criticisms

Putting it this way, I think we can see that Kant has an interesting and in many ways brilliant idea about how to find universal truths in the realm of practical reason — in the realm of values and ethics. But does it ultimately work? To decide, we have to look more closely at the categorical imperative and ask what it means and how it is supposed to function. Luckily, Kant himself used several famous examples to try to explain how this universal self-legislation would work in practice.

Consider one of Kant's most famous examples: promising. Kant, like others brought up in the Judeo-Christian tradition, was taught that it is wrong to tell a lie or to break a promise. So breaking promises is wrong. But Kant asks: *why* is it wrong? Let us apply the categorical imperative. Suppose I were to formulate a maxim of the form: "I will

make a promise in this case without intending to keep it." Now, Kant says, if you try to universalize that maxim — if you declared that everyone ought always to act in such a way that when they made promises they would not intend to keep them — the very notion of promising would break down. If everyone made promises without intending to keep them, they would not really be making any promises at all. To make a promise without intending to keep it is not to make a promise. And someone would confront you with just such an accusation: "You mean you didn't intend to keep it when you made it? Then you really didn't promise." If that maxim were universalized, it would undermine the very institution of promising and all the ways of life built upon it.

Now, you might think Kant is reasoning like this: if you made it a law that everyone would break their promises, it would be a pretty awful world to live in — you couldn't trust anybody, the consequences would be horrible, and that is why it is wrong. But Kant is not quite reasoning that way, because he wants to show not that breaking promises would have terrible consequences — which it might, though then again it might not — but that breaking promises is wrong *in itself*. He has to say something more than that the consequences would be awful, because if we bring in consequences, someone might be willing to say, "Well, I wouldn't mind living in a world in which people tended to break their promises and you couldn't trust anyone — I'm willing to accept those consequences. I may be a nasty person, but I'd thrive pretty well." As someone once put it: "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, because I am the meanest man in the valley." One could even imagine a criminal syndicate principle: "If someone informs on us, we will kill them — and if I inform on someone else, I expect to be killed." That too is a maxim one can apparently universalize. It has horrible consequences, yes, but it seems that one can consistently will it as a universal law.

So there is something problematic in the first formulation of Kant's categorical imperative: one can apparently universalize too many things, including some very bad ones.

Kant's argument therefore cannot rest on the badness of the consequences alone. Rather, he argues that in the case of promising, there is a *direct contradiction* — a practical contradiction, not just a bad outcome. It is not merely that consequences would be bad if everyone broke their promises; it is that there is an inherent contradiction in the very idea of making a promise and not intending to keep it. It is a bit like saying something is both round and square in theoretical reasoning. In practical reasoning, you promise and yet simultaneously do not undertake any real commitment — which means you undermine the very idea of a promise altogether. It is something like Groucho Marx's famous remark: "I wouldn't belong to any club that would have me as a member." Or Yogi Berra's version: "Nobody goes to that nightclub anymore — it's too crowded." Both are examples of something that undermines itself in the very act of being said.

But if we look at Kant's claim that a maxim like promise-breaking constitutes a self-contradiction of reason — so that anyone who tried to universalize it would be irrational, making a mistake like saying something is both round and square — then Kant's reasoning starts to look a little less secure, because that is a very strong claim. People began to ask: is Kant perhaps begging the question about what counts as rational? A cheater or a liar who breaks promises may be evil, may be wrong — but are they making some kind of *logical* error? That seems to be what Kant is claiming.

Consider also persons who are prepared to act morally toward those within their own group, class, race, or society, but not toward outsiders or strangers. Their maxim would be: "I will keep my promises and not tell lies to those in my own group — to my friends,

my own people — but not to outsiders." The odd thing is that this *is* a universalizable maxim. Of course, it would mean not trusting strangers, but one could be willing to live with that. Kant rules all such things out, naturally — but it is not clear that his categorical imperative in its first formulation actually does rule them out.

Consider another of his examples: suicide. Kant thinks suicide is always wrong — again, an inheritance of his Judeo-Christian culture. He tries to eliminate it using the categorical imperative by arguing that there is some kind of contradiction in the following maxim: we all have a concern for ourselves, and the person contemplating suicide is saying, in effect, "Out of concern for myself, I will take away my own life." Kant thinks that is an inconsistency of practical reason — out of a concern for my very self, I would be willing to destroy myself — and therefore a maxim that undercuts itself in the way that the one about promising did.

But this is very puzzling, because in some cultures, suicide is regarded as not only permissible but sometimes required. In Japanese culture, for example, one might be required to take one's own life if to do otherwise would bring dishonor upon oneself, one's family, and one's ancestors. There seems to be no inconsistency in universalizing the maxim that persons may commit suicide in cases where not to do so would bring dishonor upon themselves and their family. This kind of cultural variability appears to be permitted — rather than excluded — by Kant's imperative.

Thus, the first formulation of the categorical imperative — act only on those maxims which you could universalize as laws for everyone to follow — seems subject to serious criticism. Most philosophers since Kant have thought this to be the case. Hegel, one of his chief critics, said that Kant's formalism is an "empty formalism" in the sense that it does not rule out enough: it allows too many things in,

some of them very bad, and it rules out some things that seem perfectly defensible, like suicide in certain cultural contexts.

Modern Kantians have tried to revise, amend, or reinterpret Kant to make up for these problems, and Kant's ethics remains highly influential in contemporary philosophy, with various thinkers defending various parts of it even where they acknowledge its limitations.

The Principle of Humanity: A Second Formulation

One way to try to overcome these difficulties is suggested by Kant himself. He offers us a second version of his categorical imperative, which many philosophers consider more productive. He calls it his *principle of humanity*, and you have probably heard it before. It goes as follows:

Act so that you always treat humanity — in your own person as well as in the person of every other — never merely as a means to your ends, but always at the same time as an end in itself.

You use someone as a means to your ends when you subordinate their purposes to yours — when you lie to them, cheat them, or harm them in some way for your own selfish purposes. By contrast, to respect them as ends is to respect their purposes as just as worthy of being realized as your own, and not to trample on them.

Kant claims this principle of humanity is the same principle as the first formulation of his categorical imperative. Most philosophers, however, have found that far from obvious. They are certainly related, and it is interesting to see how. Remember: in order to know what is universally the right thing to do for all persons, Kant says we must be willing to rise above our individual desires and purposes and legislate universally for everyone. The second formulation comes

about when we reflect on the very fact that we *can* be such universal legislators — that we can rise above our own personal perspective and desires and think about and legislate for everyone. This capacity is our human reason, which places us above the beasts and other non-rational beings who cannot do this. And it is this very capacity, Kant thinks, that gives us our dignity and our moral worth as persons. It is that moral worth which demands respect — and that is precisely what the second formulation requires us to give.

So the capacity for universal self-legislation, which is the source of our dignity, is the underlying idea of the second formulation. And this capacity is bound up with our autonomy and free will. For Kant reasons that as long as we are moved simply by desires and purposes — which nature, after all, has given us — we are like non-rational beings, like the beasts, who are moved by their instincts and passions and are thereby determined by the laws of nature. It is only when we use our reason to act on universal principles — rising above our desires and instincts rather than merely following them — that we become truly free and autonomous agents. We rise above nature's laws.

That is why science cannot really explain free will, on Kant's account: because free will involves rising above our desires and instincts, and thereby above the laws of nature altogether, into a noumenal world beyond the merely phenomenal. This second version of the categorical imperative therefore follows from the thought that since this freedom and autonomy is what gives us dignity and worth and places us above the beasts and above nature, we should respect what gives us worth — and we should respect anyone who possesses a similar rational capacity.

Kant then relates the second version of the categorical imperative to a third principle: we should act toward all other rational beings as if we were all members of what he calls a *kingdom of ends*, whose free

actions and choices deserve respect. We have that moral worth and dignity by virtue of our very capacity to rise above our own personal interests and consider others.

In some ways, these second and third related versions of the categorical imperative are less abstract and formal than the first, and they do escape some of the criticisms aimed at it — the charge that it is an empty formalism. But they do not escape all the problems.

For example, there is a difficulty in the second formulation, the principle of humanity, that many philosophers have noted. Why should we go from respecting our *own* freedom and autonomy — which surely we should — to respecting *everyone else's* freedom and autonomy? That is precisely what the second formulation demands, but Kant does not entirely succeed in explaining this leap. He does argue that we are only truly free and autonomous when we act by the moral law, since only then do we rise above our particular desires, feelings, and instincts — the products of nature — and thereby rise above nature itself. But is this so? Can we be free *only* when we act morally? Critics like Nietzsche have said no: we can be free when we have self-mastery, without necessarily being good in the moral sense Kant requires.

These are among the ethical debates that have ensued concerning Kant's moral theory in the two centuries since he wrote. Kant did hope, however, to accomplish much more with this framework. He thought he had established the reality of the moral law and of free will through practical reason, and he further thought that if we accepted the moral law and free will, we might also have to bring in God to guarantee their efficacy and ultimate significance — and perhaps a belief in the immortal soul as well. These things could not be established by science, but he believed practical reason compelled us to presuppose them, and that is what he attempted to show.

Lecture 52: Burke — The Origins of Conservatism

Reader Jeremy Shermer

In this lecture, I am going to talk about Edmund Burke, who lived from 1729 to 1797. Let me first say a bit about the structure of the lecture as such. Initially, I am going to offer some preliminaries — an explanation of who he was and of why his thought is interesting. Next, I am going to talk about possibly the best-known aspect of Burke's work: his criticism of the early stages of the French Revolution. I am then going to tackle a rather difficult issue concerning what Burke's underlying views were, a subject on which there has been a fair bit of controversy. And finally, I am going to turn to the question of why Burke is of enduring importance.

Preliminaries: Who Was Burke?

First, he was a fascinating but in some ways quite contentious figure. He was Irish, he had a legal training, and he made a career first as a writer and then as a British politician. He was a great orator and a very powerful political writer. But he served very much as a spokesman for senior aristocratic political figures. He never held a cabinet position himself. In modern terms, one might almost say he was employed somewhat as a public relations man — putting forward in fine and eloquent ways the points that the movers and shakers behind him wanted communicated.

Burke developed, in the course of his political writings and his oratory, some striking ideas — ideas which are in some ways very much at odds with the way in which many people think about politics today. And it is this aspect of Burke's work which has been a really important influence on conservative thinkers.

At the same time, when approaching Burke, it is important to bear in mind that his work was produced in quite an unsystematic manner. What he was doing was offering comments and reactions to various contemporary events as they were unfolding. He was not a professor sitting down to write large, systematic treatises. Indeed, he himself was critical of those people who wanted to take an approach to the understanding of politics — and of the world more generally — that placed great stress on philosophical abstractions. He was not setting out to offer a philosophical system, and he never sat down to systematize or tidy up his own ideas. This means I have quite a task in front of me in trying, in just these few minutes, to give you a brief systematic account of what Burke himself was about.

One consequence of the fact that he produced different kinds of ideas in response to different kinds of problems is that there has been considerable underlying debate as to whether he has an overall philosophical system behind his views, and — if he does — what that system consists of. We will touch on this as we go.

There is also a sense in which he is, at least at first glance, a somewhat paradoxical figure. Through much of his career, Burke was known as a supporter of moderate reform — not of making sweeping changes to institutions, but certainly not as someone who opposed any change at all. He was also known for being on the side of the underdog. He was concerned about the Irish and the way in which they had been treated badly by the British. He was concerned about India and the way in which people there were being exploited. He was very much on the side of those suffering from colonial exploitation. He favored, in broad terms, the American case in the Revolution.

And yet — and this is the thing for which he is best known — he was passionate in his denunciation of the French Revolution, and this in its very early stages, at a time when the French Revolution was

fashionable and when all moderate reformers, and indeed less than moderate reformers, were enthusiastically in favor of it. So the things for which he is best known might seem, in some ways, a little out of kilter with the understanding that other people had of him.

How will we proceed? Initially, I am going to focus on his criticism of the French Revolution, because this is the material for which he is best known, and it is out of this material that we draw the ideas which have been most influential on conservatives. After this, we will move to a slightly wider context to consider the problem of how what he said about the French Revolution relates to his other views, and to look at the contentious debate about what his underlying ideas were, and whether he remains relevant today.

Burke Against the French Revolution

His key work here was *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, written in 1790. Burke's focus at the outset is very much on English radicals — people who were looking at the French Revolution and getting quite excited about it. He focused particularly on an English radical writer called Richard Price.

Price looked back to a relatively recent historical event — roughly a hundred years earlier in English history — the so-called Glorious Revolution of 1688: the constitutional change in which William and Mary, the Protestants, came to the throne, replacing the Catholic James II. Price claimed that if one examined these events from around a hundred years before, they had established clear principles: that people had a right to choose their own governors and rulers; that they had a right to call them to account and dismiss them for misconduct; and that people had a right to frame government for themselves. So the radical was claiming that these relatively recent events in British history had established just such precedents.

Burke took issue with this on two fronts. On one side, he challenged it as a historical account of what had actually happened. But he also wanted to claim that the basis for rights was not, as Price maintained, abstract principle — general notions of the rights of man — but rather what he called the rights of Englishmen, as distinct from the universal rights of man.

What underlies this claim of Burke's? It highlights something really important about his work: his criticism of appeals to natural rights. Burke characteristically claims that if people appeal in politics to ideas of natural rights, then — and I quote — "the Commonwealth itself, the government itself, would in a few generations crumble away into the dust and powder of individuality." He feared that appeals to natural rights would lead to an undermining of political order, and he was deeply critical of the destructive power of appeals to abstract principles.

By way of contrast with this, one might ask: what did Burke actually favor?

Burke's Positive Vision

Burke is a bit difficult to sum up, for the reasons I have already indicated, but I think it is worth drawing attention to several key ideas.

First, Burke takes the view that government should be a matter of prudential management and practical statesmanship, rather than being ruled by abstract principle. Let me offer an analogy. Suppose someone said to you: "I will take you out for a meal at the very best restaurant in your city, and there are two new restaurants to choose from." In one of them, the chef has a master's degree in food science and one of the finest collections of recipe books in the world. In the other, the chef served an apprenticeship under one of the top chefs

in Paris. Which would you choose? My guess is that if you wanted a good meal, as opposed to an "interesting experience," you would go with the one who had served his apprenticeship. And what Burke is concerned with is political skill — something much more like the practical skill acquired through an apprenticeship than something that can be derived from the application of abstract principles. This is a key contrast to bear in mind.

Burke also stresses that those with political power should take into account the opinions and patterns of behavior of the people they are dealing with. One might illustrate this by thinking of town planners and the paths people actually use. If you ever see the little maps that town planners produce, the little models and so on, they always seem to expect that people will follow the designated roads rather than cutting across the grass. In general, what Burke is saying is that if you are in a position of governing, you have to bear in mind what habits people have, what dispositions they have, what aptitudes they have, and what their outlook on the world is — and you must work with that, rather than assuming that because you are pursuing some worthy goal, you can simply get people to do exactly what you would like them to do. So he is saying, again, not only that politics is an art and a craft involving skill rather than abstract principle, but that the person who is good at politics is the person who is a proper judge of people and their concerns and dispositions.

Above all, Burke stressed the significance of the British Constitution and of other constitutions and bodies of traditional law. Why? First, he saw these things as historical achievements, whose authority depended very much on their history — on their being there, on the very fact that they were accepted — rather than on some notion that they could be grounded on abstract principles or philosophy. Second, in his view, the best rulers were aristocrats. For Burke, these were people who had behind them a tradition and a historical

heritage, who had substantial property and therefore a real stake in the country and how it fared, who had particular local knowledge and attachments, and who genuinely cared about the country, the people they knew, and the people who depended on them. At the same time, he stressed very strongly that those who held political power had a duty to the people — to look after their concerns and interests, rather than simply to act in pursuit of their own advantage.

This combination — a historical heritage embodied in the Constitution, and obligations on the part of rulers with appropriate skills to the population they served — should, in Burke's view, be seen as the proper basis for reform. That is to say, if things are going wrong, what you should do is find ways to put them right that serve to enhance, prop up, and continue the tradition. You should appeal to precedent and tradition, rather than doing things that would undermine it and cut people adrift. And while you are doing this — while you are finding precedents for what you are doing, while calling people back to their historic duties — you should also be pragmatic, rather than standing on formal rights and entitlements. This again comes back to the notion of politics as a skill, rather than a matter of reading abstract principles out of a book.

The Constitution itself is seen as precious — as a precious historical achievement — but also as vulnerable, and vulnerable on two counts. On one side, it is vulnerable to plausible-sounding appeals to reason, to rationality, to schemes that people dream up. On the other side, he is concerned about populist appeals and the way in which people may become inflamed about things. He is also concerned that the Constitution may become unbalanced. One of his real preoccupations in the England of his day was the way in which the Crown and the Court — acceptable in their proper place, but deeply worrying if they acquired too much power — might tip over and overbalance the Constitution. It is a little like an American today

being worried that the executive was accumulating too much power, if one believed that what you really needed was a balanced Constitution. And so one of Burke's consistent concerns was to deal with problems in such a way that they did not undermine the Constitution or disrupt its balance.

Burke's Underlying Views: Natural Rights and Convention

What serves to explain all of this, and in particular Burke's hostility to appeals to abstract principles?

There has been quite a bit of contention about it, but I have been struck by a suggestion made by a contemporary British academic, Ian Hampshire-Monk, who is the editor of the journal *History of Political Thought* and has written extensively about Burke. What Hampshire-Monk suggests is that one can draw a contrast between two different interpretations of the idea of natural rights.

On one side, there is the view attributed to John Locke, where people in the state of nature — an imagined situation prior to the existence of government — already have fairly well-defined rights. These rights provide a basis on which people can go about their daily business, recognize one another's entitlements, and get along reasonably well. These rights are then preserved by and form the basis for government. On this Lockean view, if you want to understand what government is doing and how its powers arise, you appeal back to rights that people had in the state of nature prior to government. And they also provide, from Locke's perspective, a basis on which one can call government to account — one can say that government is here failing to respect people's rights and acting wrongly.

By way of contrast, there is another view of natural rights, found in Thomas Hobbes and also in a figure significant in this context called John Selden. On their view, natural rights sustain only the grimmest forms of life — a kind of dog-eat-dog situation where people have a natural right to do whatever they need to do in order to survive, but where, since people's rights and survival needs may conflict, simply appealing to what one has a natural right to do produces, as Hobbes put it, a state of nature where life is nasty, brutish, and short. On this view, natural rights are something that must be surrendered when people enter into government if life is to be decent at all, and if people begin appealing under government to notions of natural rights, this will dissolve everything and drive people back into the state of nature and its horrible conditions.

On this second view, in the form given to it by Selden — to whom Hampshire-Monk argues Burke explicitly refers — government rests not on explicit agreements by which it was set up, but on traditions and customs that are internalized by the population. Indeed, Burke, discussing this kind of thing, spoke of people's *prejudices*. He did not mean something pejorative. What he meant was that our rights and the possibilities of a decent life all depend upon people's prejudices in the sense of particular outlooks on the world, particular habits that people have, which will differ from country to country, but where people having the appropriate interlocking set of these habits and dispositions makes for a civilized life.

These historical products are, in Burke's view, the basis for people's real rights in different specific countries — but they will obviously be specific to those countries, because they fit in with the particular constitutions and habits of different peoples. They are, for Burke, conventional: they have simply grown up over time. They are not something capable of rational demonstration. And indeed, for Burke, they may rest on historical fictions. For example, people in the British

tradition, and in other countries that have inherited it, might appeal to Magna Carta. Historians may tell us that Magna Carta is not really a fundamental guarantee of people's rights. Burke's view is essentially: it does not really matter what it actually was historically. What matters is what people believe it to be and that it works.

The picture that emerges here is one of a whole set of conventions, traditions, and ways of seeing things that are important for civilized life — that guarantee the specific rights that people have in particular countries. You cannot demonstrate this stuff abstractly. And Burke wanted to claim, against the reformers of his day, that the alternative to such conventions was not — as the supporters of reform were claiming — the rule of reason, but in fact a reversion to the state of nature. The only alternative was something that would allow only the barest and most miserable of existence. In Burke's view, we arrive at exactly that if we try to conduct politics on the basis of abstract principle, because it gnaws away at and undermines the very niceties that make a decent life possible.

Burke's view was that even in the early days of the French Revolution, when other people thought what was going on was entirely fine, what had happened and what was beginning to happen there was something dreadful that would turn out very badly. And one of the things that has been particularly galling for radicals both at the time and ever since was that Burke turned out to be right.

Burke also expressed concern about the attacks on religion that were taking place. Why? First, Burke was himself a sincere religious believer and was genuinely upset by those attacks. Second, he saw religion as having an important role in political life. Religious authority, he thought, keeps ordinary people in order — if you are mindful that God has his eye on you, that may serve as a restraint. But what was most important for Burke was that it keeps really powerful people in order too. If rulers know that they will ultimately

have to answer to God, they may be a little less inclined simply to pursue their own interests and somewhat more inclined to consider the interests of the people. He was also shocked by the open profession of atheism in France and upset by the confiscation of church property, because it undermined what he thought was a really important role of religious institutions in that society: namely, as corporate bodies separate from the state.

Why did this concern him? He thought it was important that there were bodies independent of the state — bodies with a continued existence over time, with substantial property and wealth — that could serve as a check on arbitrary government. If all power is concentrated in the government, there is nowhere to turn for relief. But if you have different powerful bodies around — bodies with substance, tradition, and wealth — they serve as a check on government exercising its will in arbitrary ways.

Burke was also concerned about the character of the political reform taking place in France. He was concerned on one side that the changes being made to the electoral system were undermining the close links that had previously existed between constituents and their representatives. Indeed, Burke had a very distinctive view about political representation. He stressed the notion that people should be representatives of the particular places where there were electors, but he also stressed the significance of the independent judgment of those elected. He said: these people are not delegates and should not be delegates. Rather, you elect someone to exercise their judgment on your behalf — and on behalf of what is good for the country — rather than electing a delegate who, when a new issue arises, has to return and consult with his constituents. What we need, he said, are people with appropriate ties and appropriate contacts, whom you then elect so that they may use their own judgment and wisdom to arrive at good conclusions.

He was worried, too, that the changes were undermining local attachments, which he feared would lead to a kind of social atomization. He consistently stressed the importance of specific local characters and characteristics, and he was against anything that seemed to treat everyone as abstract individuals. He was also worried about who the people actually driving reform were. They were often lawyers and doctors — perfectly good people — but people who, for Burke, suffered from the fundamental problem that they had no political experience. Going back to the chef analogy: you would not want someone without culinary training to be cooking your meal, however upright a person they were, however good a lawyer. Similarly, Burke was saying: what you want are people who actually have experience, who know something about the craft of politics.

He was also concerned about how radical political reform might call the loyalty of the army into question. He wanted to stress that the loyalty of a powerful body of people in a society is something that depends on traditions and emotions — it is not something you can treat in a purely pragmatic or business-like manner. I think he would be very troubled by contemporary changes in the armed forces where they are essentially treated like a branch of business. His view would be that you need to keep up the traditions of these people; you need to maintain them as a distinctive form of life, because they are being asked to perform in ways that are very different from the rest of the population.

Burke's Underlying Philosophy: An Interpretation

At various points in his argument, Burke appeals to natural law — principles perhaps founded in human nature, timeless moral principles — and also to utility, meaning considerations about what

makes for the greatest good of the greatest number and for social well-being. He also at times makes common cause with Adam Smith's economics, saying he agreed with Smith on economic matters. These various threads have been appealed to when people have tried to make a systematic interpretation of Burke, with different scholars taking up one or another of these themes and arguing that it is natural law, or utility, or parallels with Smith's free market thought, that provides the key to a coherent reading. They have been the basis of interesting but conflicting interpretations. The problem, I think, is that each of them seems plausible, but none is fully satisfactory.

There are additional difficulties. Burke appeals in the course of his argument to natural law in respect of colonial injustices in India. He approves of the American Revolution. Yet he is deeply critical of the French Revolution. What is one to make of all this?

Well, here I will step in where angels fear to tread and offer my own attempt at an interpretation. First, in Burke's view, good government depends on traditions and conventions and is ideally aristocratic and Christian in character. Second, one faces terrible dangers if one undermines this by appealing to natural rights, because rights for Burke are matters of tradition and convention — not something natural. They depend on habit and prejudice. If conventional rights are undermined, the result is not the rule of reason but the rule of violence.

The American Revolution was acceptable to him — or at least not objectionable — because what was being appealed to there were traditional English rights, notions such as no taxation without representation, and there was no attempt to remake the entire society from scratch. In the case of India, Burke does appeal to natural law in the face of flagrant injustice. I do not think Burke is a relativist — he is not saying that whatever happens anywhere is

acceptable. But in his judgment, natural law is very general, in many respects rather unspecific, and something to which appeal can really only be made in very extraordinary situations. Some Burke specialists have indeed warned us to be a little careful about these appeals, noting that he was a rhetorician speaking often in Parliament, and that what politicians invoke as matters of grave principle does not always bear scrutiny beyond the speech itself. Others insist that natural law really is the key to his thought. The debates continue.

Burke's Enduring Importance

What, after all, is one to make of Burke? What is his enduring importance?

First, he has a clear and obvious appeal for conservatives. Despite the unsystematic and rhetorical character of his views, they constitute a mine of valuable insights — both in terms of specific arguments and in terms of genuinely powerful images. Second, he has an acute appreciation of the dangers of uncritically rationalist approaches to politics. His claims about the likely consequences of such approaches in the French Revolution were vindicated. People really thought he was a terrible alarmist when he said the French Revolution would lead to blood — but it did. And there is a sense in which his argument has been echoed, consciously or unconsciously, by many people who have criticized the idealism behind certain forms of totalitarianism, warning that this will lead to disaster.

In my view, Burke's approach is of great value too — and this may seem a bit strange — to would-be reformers. His awareness of, and insistence on, the fact that people act out of prejudice is something that any would-be reformer really has to take seriously. One needs to recognize people as socialized beings — as Americans, or British, or Australians, or indeed people from very specific, localized

backgrounds — and understand that what will work with one group of people will not work with another. If reformers are going to be effective, they need to recognize that they are working with people in this full sense, rather than treating them as abstract individuals. Going back to the planners and the paths: planners really have to bear in mind what people are actually like and how they are actually going to behave. Just as someone going on a diet has to take a realistic view of themselves and their dispositions, rather than imagining that a few clear New Year's resolutions — not unlike appeals to natural rights — can simply undo all of one's habits and ingrained ways of behaving.

Indeed, I think that close attention to Burke's concerns has important lessons for everybody. This is something I have had to learn for myself. As recently as 1996, I argued in a published book — and I quote — "an exaggerated respect for Burke is perhaps the mark of poor judgment in a political theorist." I think now that I have to eat my words.

Summary

Let me just recap what we have covered in this lecture. First, I went over some preliminaries — who Burke was and why his thought is interesting. I then discussed his critique of the French Revolution and his criticism of appeals to abstract rights. We then examined Burke's underlying views, the controversies surrounding them, and I offered an interpretation of my own. Finally, I concluded by saying something about his enduring importance — both for conservatives, and for the would-be reformer.

Lecture 53: Hegel, History and Historicism

Professor Darren Stalloff

G.W.F. Hegel was certainly one of the most important and profound philosophers of the last two hundred years, one whose influence has extended to almost every branch of philosophy and almost every branch of the human sciences. He is particularly important as a philosopher of history — he is really the father of modern historicism and idealism. But I would urge that part of what motivated Hegel's analysis of history was that in history he saw a counterexample to the mechanistic materialism that had characterized the Enlightenment. In that way, Hegel's idealism and historicism represents a romantic reaction against the excesses of the Enlightenment.

Unpacking the Key Terms: Historicism and Idealism

What do we mean by this? First, I want to unpack the word historicism. Hegel's historicism lies in his realization that history, unlike what the Enlightenment had argued, does not exemplify the kind of mathematical laws found in physics. Rather, history is a developmental process where the standards and parameters of action and interpretation change, grow, and develop over time. Thus, historicism — and particularly Hegel's historicism — insists there is no mathematical, rational, or super-historical vantage point from which we can judge historical action and historical events. We must always look at the past in its own terms. Hegel was the first to bring us to understand the anachronism of Enlightenment critiques of the past.

Now, to say Hegel is an idealist is to point out that what develops over time in history is intelligence, culture, and mind — what he

called *spirit*. That is to say, it is our ideas, our cultures, our mentalities which develop in time, both in history and in biography, in each of our own individual experiences. And it is that part of nature or of the world — our ideas, our cultures, our minds — that the historian is concerned with. We will look to see these two important themes of historicism and idealism unfold in the account of Hegel's philosophy of history.

The Challenge of Hegel's Language

Although it is incredibly important, Hegel's philosophy of history is also incredibly abstruse and difficult to understand. In part, this is because Hegel's work comprises what he calls an absolute perspective — which is to say, Hegel would claim you cannot understand anything he has written until you have read and understood everything he has written.

I would argue that this is in a sense correct, precisely because Hegel has a tendency to use language in a way we are not accustomed to. His language literally makes up what we might call the interlocking parts of a Rubik's cube. I could, for example, very easily summarize all of Hegel's philosophy of history in four sentences, and they would be the following.

One: History is the dialectical process whereby spirit comes to know itself and realizes its idea. Two: Freedom is the idea of spirit, and spirit is reason in and for itself. Three: The means of this realization — or cunning of reason — is the passions of the individual as both subject and object of history, and its form is the state. And finally, four: The national spirit is a moment in the development of the world spirit, and for each such moment, as for all, the owl of Minerva spreads its wings only with the setting of dusk.

Now, these sentences really do adequately describe Hegel's theory. They are also completely impenetrable. If any of you understand them, you are either incredibly brilliant or slightly mad. The reason they are impenetrable is that Hegel is using words we think we recognize in peculiar and technical ways. What I want to do in this lecture is to unpack each of these sentences by translating Hegelian terminology into something close to everyday vernacular English. Having done that, we will have an opportunity, time permitting, to look at some of the implications and consequences of Hegel's philosophy of history.

Sentence One: History as a Dialectical Process

Let me repeat the first sentence. *History is the dialectical process whereby spirit comes to know itself and realizes its idea.*

First, when Hegel speaks of history, he always means world history — philosophically conceived history. He is thinking about the sum of human experiences as understood under a rational conception. And as Hegel says, if you look at the world rationally, it looks back rationally. That is the job of the philosopher of history: to find the rational principle uncovered in that development. So history, for Hegel, is always world history.

What does the phrase *dialectical process* mean? You are going to hear that phrase a great deal. Hegel uses it, and other Hegelians — like Marxists — use it as well. You may have heard of the famous analysis of the dialectic into its three moments: thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. That probably doesn't shed a lot of light either. I think the best way to understand it is to look at concrete examples that illustrate what we mean by this dialectic of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis.

One of the classic triads is that between undifferentiated unity, differentiated disunity, and their synthesis in differentiated unity. Again, I do not expect this to mean a great deal until I can cash it in with examples. So let me give an example of undifferentiated unity: the normal nuclear family. It is a *unity* in that it is bound by affection and love. It is *undifferentiated* in that the principles that make it up are not separable into atomic individualism — which is to say, it is a unity not broken down into distinct individuals each pursuing their own selfish interests. Within the family, we assume that every member is interested in the good of the whole, hence undifferentiated unity.

Its antithesis — its Hegelian dialectical opposite — is civil society, the civil society of the economic marketplace, in which we have differentiated disunity. Civil society, the economic marketplace, is made up of differentiated individuals — atomic individuals, each with their own particular interests, goals, and agendas. And it forms a disunity in the sense that those interests come into conflict with one another. That conflict is competitive, and what benefits one agent may in fact harm another. So there we have two opposites: the undifferentiated unity of the family, and the differentiated disunity of civil society.

How are they synthesized? In a *differentiated unity*, which Hegel finds in the state. The state, on the one hand, keeps us differentiated — we are each legal persons, legal individuals. And yet it makes up a unity insofar as laws are created to ensure that our interests serve the larger public good, so that our actions always benefit society as a whole. That, then, is a differentiated unity. Note that both of the previous moments of that synthesis persist in the final synthetic moment: the state is made up of families and the economic marketplace of civil society simultaneously — they are simply subsumed within this larger synthesis. That, I think, is a good

illustration of what we mean by the dialectic of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis.

Now, we still have to explain the word *spirit*. Since we are talking about world history, this will always be referred to as world spirit. In short, world spirit is the agent and subject of history. This may also seem strange, but essentially Hegel is talking about what we might call collective subjectivity. We might think of this in terms of national spirits — the sort of set of characteristics that define a people.

This was, in fact, one of the great breakthroughs of the early nineteenth century in terms of historical thought. A host of philosophers, Herder among them, had discovered that there are indeed distinct national characters — that Englishmen have different propensities with regard to authority than, say, Prussians; that Italians have a different sense of authority than Frenchmen; and that Scots have a different set of attributes with regard to economic activity than, say, Spaniards. This discovery, in the early nineteenth century, helped create the very locus for nationalism and the emergence of national consciousness. That is very much what Hegel is talking about when he speaks of national spirits as moments in world spirit.

It is a peculiar notion to us because we do not usually think in terms of collective subjects — but in fact we still sometimes do. In our legal culture, a criminal case is always Jeffrey Dahmer versus the people of Michigan. That is that collective subject. When we describe the Second World War, we do not say the Emperor of Japan declared war on Franklin Roosevelt — we say Japan attacked the United States. Again, we are invoking that collective subjectivity. The essential notion is that it is what informs national character.

We now come to the last three words of the sentence: *realizes its idea*. To realize is actually the most straightforward word in the entire sentence. For Hegel, to realize is to make real — the contrast being

between real or actual as opposed to potential. Aristotle is the key backdrop here. A child is potentially an adult. Given the right conditions, it can become one — Hegel would say it realizes its adulthood, it makes its adulthood real. And the word *idea*, for Hegel, means essence.

So world history, then, is this system of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis in which cultures or national minds come to know themselves and make real their essence. But what is that essence? That turns up in the next sentence.

Sentence Two: Freedom, Spirit, and Reason

Freedom is the idea of spirit, and spirit is reason in and for itself.

What does Hegel mean by reason? He means abstract rationality — the sort of structure or order of intelligence that we find in the universe, both in the natural world in the immanent laws of physics, and in the cultural world in the realm of philosophy and abstraction. For Hegel, this is the philosophical expression of what religious people mean by God — the essential notion of a rationality behind the realm of phenomena. Hegel calls this abstract quality *reason in itself*.

So when he says freedom is the idea of spirit, he means freedom is the essence of spirit, and spirit is this abstract rationality. Its dialectical antithesis — to this abstract reason that we find in culture, or in the idea of God prior to creation, an abstract logos as it were — its dialectical antithesis is nature, which Hegel calls *reason out of itself*. What does he mean by that? Nature is just as rational as the mind of God, but it is rational in an unselfconscious way. The universe does follow mathematical laws and does disclose a form of rationality, but the universe itself is not aware of that.

The synthesis of these two is spirit — the collective mind of man — which is *reason in and for itself*. It is a reason which is both aware of its abstract nature and also aware of the fact that it follows mathematical laws without its own volition. Together, those two combine to create the self-consciousness of man, who realizes that he is distinct from the rest of animal creation: that he is that part of the universe which both follows mathematical laws and is capable of formulating laws for himself. Hegel calls this reason in and for itself.

Finally, let me turn to the first word of the sentence, which I have left until the end: *freedom*. This is very important for Hegel. He does not mean what the Anglo-American tradition calls liberty — he does not mean freedom from the control of the state. Rather, he means what Kant meant by the word autonomy: self-lawmaking. Man is free to the extent that he creates his own laws for himself, that he creates his own mores and norms. In that sense, his freedom consists in following his true nature and true essence, which is the ability to rationally stipulate his own codes of conduct.

Sentence Three: The Cunning of Reason and the Role of Great Men

The means of this realization, or cunning of reason, is the passions of the individual as both subject and object of history, and its form is the state.

By passion, Hegel means self-interested action. He does not mean lust, greed, or avarice. He means rather the sort of activity we find in an animal, or in this case a human, who follows their own self-interest. Anytime that self-interest seizes or animates your will, Hegel says you are subject to passion. It is a very Kantian notion: your interests, being determined by social circumstances, mean that every time you follow those interests, your actions are being determined

by forces outside of you. That is what he means by passion — as opposed to rational deliberation coming from within, based on pure abstract rationality, which would be freedom. A healthy or happy state is one in which the common good is fulfilled through our pursuit of our passions.

What does he mean by the individual as *subject* of history? Here Hegel refers to what we might call the great man theory of history. Figures like Caesar, Alexander, Napoleon, and Martin Luther — figures who transformed world history and moved what he calls world spirit forward. How does this happen? Hegel argues that as a nation or culture develops and its mores and institutions become established, sometimes the circumstances of that culture outstrip those mores and institutions, and fundamental changes become necessary. But they cannot be made from within the culture of that society, precisely because those mores are in conflict with the necessary changes. What then happens is that a great man steps forward who fundamentally transforms the prevailing mores and practices. This is what Martin Luther did — and we could equally think of Julius Caesar.

The mores Caesar inherited were those of Republican Rome. But the rise of the latifundia, the decline of the independent peasantry, and the growth of Roman power had meant that all the institutions of Republican Rome no longer provided stable governance. And so Caesar instituted the great reforms necessary to move world history forward. He created the great Roman Empire with himself as first citizen, thus setting up what would eventually be best exemplified under the reign of the divine Augustus.

The key for Hegel is that these individuals move world spirit forward by creating new mores and new circumstances, sacrificing their own happiness to their passions. Caesar did not institute his reforms because he thought they were right — he was driven by self-interest.

He wanted to be dictator of Rome, and the only way to achieve that was to solve the problems the historical situation had presented to him. Similarly, we might think of Napoleon, who had that same overweening will to power, that same passion, that same self-interest. In order to become the undisputed emperor of Europe, he was forced to reform the legal codes of the countries he conquered — thereby modernizing and secularizing them, and instituting the modern lineaments of civil society and the nation-state — not because he thought these were the right things to do, but because they were necessary to hold power.

In Hegel's view, this is world spirit using the great man and his passions to create progress. This is part of the cunning of reason: it uses the great man for the advance of spirit, while his motives are almost always selfish and practical. And moreover, all of these great men will suffer tragic ends. They will never achieve the happiness they seek, but they will nonetheless help move history forward.

What does he mean by the individual as *object* of history? This is where the philosophy begins to take on a somewhat troubling aspect. He means the rest of us — those who are private individuals and are, I think Hegel is quite right to see it this way, the victims of history. If we think of what the great events of history are — famines, plagues, and above all wars — most of us experience those things as calamities and tragedies. History happens to us when we are individuals as object of history, and it is indeed a calamity. But here too this is part of the cunning of history. These transformations — from a medieval order to a modern secular order, for instance — all require immense suffering. But the spirit never suffers. That is the cunning of reason: we suffer so that the spirit need not.

Finally, what does Hegel mean by the *state*? He means in part what we mean — a government — but he means more than that. He also means the culture of a people, its organizing principles, its mores,

that which allows for the integration of the individual into a civil society, into a family or a state, each of which are expressions of the morality and law that Hegel thinks is the very essence of a state. For Hegel, the state is not just the government. It is the foundation for religion, art, and of course science.

Sentence Four: National Spirit, World Spirit, and the Owl of Minerva

The national spirit is a moment in the development of the world spirit, and for each such moment, as for all, the owl of Minerva spreads its wings only with the setting of dusk.

The basic point Hegel wants to make is that spirit — or culture — comes to an awareness of its essential freedom, the fact that it creates itself on the basis of abstract rationality, in the minds of men in history, through their actions, in their antithesis with nature. Each stage of this growing awareness that man is in fact a realm of ends in and of himself is exemplified in a particular people or nation which at that moment is the highest expression of the world spirit. The world spirit, as it were, works its way through discrete national spirits, moving from place to place in the world.

For Hegel, this process must begin with the state or organized community, because only there is the question of morality and abstract law first cognizable or realizable. So for Hegel, history begins with the Oriental civilizations — Sumer, Egypt, Babylon. They developed the insight that one is free, meaning that the absolute despot of those states — who is often considered an incarnation of the deity — is himself understood to be free in the sense of an entity capable of legislating for himself. Yet even here, this is not a full notion of freedom. In part because only one is free: only the Pharaoh is free, only the cosmocratic king of Babylon is free. Everyone else is

his slave. Moreover, even this freedom turns out to be really the capricious whim of a despot — one who is likely to be overcome not by rational deliberation but by his own self-interests and his own passions. Hence, it is a very rudimentary notion of freedom.

From these Oriental civilizations, the world spirit moves to its next stage — a greater understanding of freedom — in Greek and Roman society. The Greeks and Romans were the first to learn a greater extent of freedom: namely, that *some* are free. In their case, however, the distinction between nature and reason that they develop is in fact too absolute.

What do we mean by saying some are free? We mean that in Greek and Roman society, freedom was extended to a very small percentage of the overall community — those who were citizens. The vast bulk of Athenians were not citizens: they were either freedmen, metics, or slaves. Similarly, in Roman society, the vast bulk of people living in Roman Italy were slaves or freedmen, not citizens. Only the citizens were free, because only the citizens could create law, could become that rational, deliberative agency.

So there we find again a progression on the earlier notion — where one is free, now some are free, a few are free, the lucky citizens. It is only with the Germanic peoples — by which Hegel means the northern Europeans — through their experience of Christianity, that man comes to understand, or better, that world spirit comes to understand, that *all* men are free. This is because Christianity teaches the essential notion of the dignity of all men and the equality of all men — that all men are capable, at least in theory, of legislating for themselves in a Kantian, autonomous fashion.

Now let me turn to the last phrase of that final sentence: *the owl of Minerva spreads its wings only with the setting of dusk*. That is actually a paraphrase of a much larger passage in which Hegel wrote that

history paints its gray on gray, and so on. To summarize briefly: for Hegel, the owl is always a symbol of wisdom. The owl of Minerva means, essentially, that historical understanding comes only when something is done. We understand a historical action when it has come to a close. As we say, hindsight is twenty-twenty.

Spirit, in other words, only understands itself after it has finished its action in a particular historical context. The Greeks come to understand that some are free — they come to understand it in their philosophy, literally in the writings of Plato and Aristotle, who first expressed these notions philosophically. They are able to do so only because Greek society, the Greek polis, the locus of that freedom, has run its course. Plato and Aristotle can only write as they did, for Hegel, because they can only understand the Greek polis now that it is about to be swept aside by the Macedonian Empire. We come to understand something only when it has come to an end.

Consequences and Implications

What are some of the consequences of this worldview?

On the one hand, history becomes what Hegel wanted it to be: a strong counterexample to the Enlightenment notion of law-like regularity. Contrary to Hume, for example, Hegel would say an Englishman is not like a Greek, and a Frenchman is not like a Roman. Each people is different because each people represents a different stage in the development of world spirit. That, obviously, is an advantage. It gives us a richer way of understanding history.

But at the same time, such historicism also leads to historical relativism. Because we can have no specific conception of any absolute reason in itself, outside of its manifestation in space and time, all we have is its particular level of historical evolution as embodied in one national spirit or another. Thus, the very canons of

rationality and morality shift over time, and there are no grounds for criticizing them from a super-historical point of view. Which means, strangely enough, that we cannot criticize sixteenth-century Europe for its intolerance, because that would be anachronistic — tolerance was a later development of world spirit.

Another implication that follows directly from this historical relativism is that Hegel's philosophy can be intensely conservative, nationalistic, militaristic, and statist. And this is not coincidental. In fact, Prussia at the time had experienced no small amount of student radicalism. Hegel was hired by the Prussian state to be their court philosopher and to preach to these young student radicals and convince them of the errors of their ways. He was thoroughly effective — so much so that he did indeed become the court philosopher of Prussia, to whose lectures not only students but many government officials would come.

The reason his philosophy is so conservative is precisely that the spirit of a people is an organic growth, not subject to utopian criticism. The sort of criticism one found among French revolutionaries is anti-Hegelian. As he puts it: the rational is the real, and the real is the rational. This means that if world spirit is going to achieve some goal — that is, the rational — it will become real, and no human agency is necessary to bring it about. You cannot force it to happen. Whatever now exists is the result of historical evolution, and in that sense it represents as far as we have yet gone. What is, is right. The philosophy is nationalistic because the movement of world spirit proceeds not through classes or genders but through nations, which are the agency of history. And given that nations are the agencies of history, we know how they resolve their dialectical conflicts: thesis and antithesis meet on the battlefield. War, therefore, becomes the mechanism by which history moves forward. Indeed, some twentieth-century Hegelians have quipped that the ultimate

resolution of the left-wing and right-wing interpretations of Hegel's philosophy of history was settled at Stalingrad. And finally, the philosophy is statist because it implies that the state is the highest nexus of human freedom.

I want to leave you with one last troubling conclusion from Hegel. He claimed that the owl of Minerva spreads its wings only with the setting of dusk — we understand something only when it has come to an end. But Hegel also claimed to understand history with a capital H. In some sense, then, Hegel must have believed that history itself had come to a close. And indeed, some might consider that just a tad delusional, even for a Prussian philosopher.

Lecture 54: Marx, Historical Materialism

Professor Darren Stalloff

In our last lecture, we examined Hegel's philosophy of history and saw that Hegel used history to argue against the mechanistic materialism of the Enlightenment in favor of a more idealist and historicist perspective. In this lecture, we turn to a figure who was both a disciple and a critic of Hegel: Karl Marx.

In many ways, Marx was the last partisan of the Enlightenment. He was profoundly affected by Hegelian philosophy, as well as Kantian moral theory, French political communism, and British political economy. But I think Marx's overarching goal in synthesizing these various sources was to create a world philosophy that would answer Hegel's idealist explanation of history in purely naturalistic or scientific terms. Marx wants, ultimately, to argue that the Enlightenment was right — that you can arrive at a naturalistic and law-like explanation of human development and historical change.

Marx made his arguments in a variety of different texts at different stages of his life. In this lecture, we look at one particular thread found across many of his writings: his historical materialism. What I am going to offer is a rational reconstruction of that doctrine drawn from a variety of different works.

I will begin with what I call the point of departure — the background assumptions and basic premises that Marx engages in formulating his historical materialism. Then, for the bulk of the lecture, we will look at the actual development of the doctrine itself: how it is constructed, and what are the laws of historical development that Marx thought could be verified scientifically. And finally, we will look

at what the implications of that philosophy of history and theory of historical materialism are for current historical realities.

The Point of Departure: Three Background Issues

Let us begin with that background set of issues. Our point of embarkation is a phrase Marx throws out in the *Communist Manifesto*, where he says communism is the solution to the problem of history. But what does Marx mean by the problem of history? It turns out that it constitutes what Marxists call a *problematic* — a set of background assumptions and issues. We will be looking at three critical ones, which constitute the themes that will be developed in our account of historical materialism. We should expect these themes or issues to interact in a dialectical or dynamic process of evolution in the human past, one punctuated by sharp conjunctures we refer to as revolutions.

Philosophical Anthropology: Man as Homo Faber

The first of these three issues is what I would describe as philosophical anthropology — that is, how do we characterize the human species naturalistically? What distinguishes it from the rest of the animal kingdom? Traditionally, philosophers have answered that by saying man is a rational animal. But Marx was a contemporary of Darwin, and a great admirer of Darwin's work. For Marx, that answer puts the evolutionary cart before the horse. Why would humans have developed rationality? What purpose could it have served? And the answer he finds is this: man is the only animal that actually refashions his environment in accord with changing needs.

We might therefore define man as *homo faber* — man the maker, man the tool user. Other animals certainly work and produce. Bees build hives. Beavers build dams. But the hives and dams they build always follow the same pattern — it is an instinctual activity. In the

case of humans, it is reflective. And this, for Marx, is probably the key to understanding how reason and intellect evolved in the first place. It served a distinct evolutionary need: it allowed us to refashion our natural environments in far more productive ways than those available to less intelligent species. So our first background assumption is that man is a producing animal — man is *homo faber*.

The Division of Labor

The second issue is more natural-historical, and it is based on an observation substantiated by almost all anthropologists since: if we look at every human community, even the most primitive so-called traditional or hunter-gatherer societies, we find that the task of production is always organized around a division of labor. Obviously, this is highly developed in advanced capitalist societies. But in medieval society, the estates or orders were based on a division of labor — peasants worked, warriors fought, and priests prayed. Even primitive hunter-gatherer societies divide the work, with men hunting and women and children gathering. And obviously, this is because division of labor makes production more efficient.

Scarcity

The third issue, which conjoins with the previous two to explain the problem of history, is scarcity. Every society that has ever existed has been unable to produce enough goods to supply all the human needs and wants of all its members. We have never been able to produce enough of all the things people want — and that is the problem of scarcity.

This is critical for Marx because, given that shortage, he finds it entirely predictable that one part of society will establish itself as a ruling stratum or class in order to enclose a disproportionate share of the social income — and thus be able to live a more fulfilling and richly rewarding life. This ties back into the earlier background assumptions because production is incapable of supplying all human

needs, and the division into classes or strata will be based on the position one occupies within the division of labor.

This behavior, for Marx, is strictly causally determined. As a political project, Marxists need to denounce what they call bourgeois exploitation. But as a doctrine of historical materialism, Marx would argue, à la Kant, that this is purely heteronomous behavior which cannot be avoided. It is entirely understandable, rational, and predictable that given a shortage of the goods of life, some people will try to get more so that they can live a better life. And that is not morally good or morally bad — it is simply an animal acting on the basis of its self-interest and rationality. Those, then, are the background assumptions and issues that form the context of Marx's development of historical materialism.

The Doctrine of Historical Materialism

Marxist historical materialism begins by positing two fundamental entities, from which all other historical phenomena will be derived. They are, on the one hand, actual historical persons — flesh and blood — and on the other, something Marx calls the *forces of production*. Actual historical persons are fairly straightforward. The key, obviously, is going to be that other element, the forces of production. We will find that the story of human history is largely the story of the development of the productive forces.

The Forces of Production

What do we mean by productive forces? They in turn comprise two elements: what Marx calls the *means of production*, and *abstract labor power*.

The means of production are simply those things we use to produce. They include tools — if one is a blacksmith, one's anvil, hammer, and forge are means of production; if one is a farmer, one's plow and

seed are means of production. They also include facilities or productive spaces. If one runs a factory, that space is critical to production regardless of whether one owns or leases it. This is particularly important in earlier periods of technology when, for example, water power was used to drive a mill — a particular site near a stream or river was therefore critical as a means of production. And finally, they include raw materials, which are the objects of labor. We should understand raw materials broadly as whatever enters a productive process and is refashioned. A blacksmith working on iron bars and fashioning them into horseshoes is treating those bars as raw materials, even though those bars were themselves rolled from iron ore. In any given productive process, the inputs we will call raw materials and the outputs the final results.

Far more important, however, is the second element in the forces of production: abstract labor power. It too is composed of two elements. One is the mechanical power of the human musculature — the physical ability to burn calories and get work done. This is a historical phenomenon because it varies with time and place. The amount of protein in one's diet has a great deal to do with how much physical labor one can sustain and with how much musculature one can develop. But probably the more important part of abstract labor power is technique and skill — that is, technology. As we develop better techniques of rolling iron, our musculature is able to produce more. As we develop better techniques of plowing, we are able to achieve larger yields from the same labor inputs and the same acreage.

Probably the most important component of skill in the modern epoch is science, because it is applied science that generates technology. Our scientific knowledge of nature and the technology we derive from it is one of the most critical elements of this abstract labor power. Hence Marx's view that this element does in fact evolve

over time: as science and technology evolve, so does our mastery over nature and our ability to produce more and more with constant labor inputs.

Relations of Production

We now have two elements — persons and productive forces — and they stand in various relations to one another. These Marx calls *productive relations* or *relations of production*. For example, if I am a factory owner, I stand in a particular relation to that means of production — I own it. That is a relation of production: ownership. Consider another: master and slave. A master owns the abstract labor power of his slave in the very person of that slave, so mastery is a second relation of production. If I do not own a factory but rent it, that is another relation of production: renting. For much of the early modern period in England, much agricultural production took place on leased land, so leasing was another relation of production. And in modern industrial and post-industrial societies, contracts form one of the basic relations of production — particularly wage labor contracts, in which one purchases another's abstract labor power not in the form of their person, but in the form of a lease on their time, eight hours a day, or in an earlier period, perhaps by piecework.

Marx argues that each of these relations of production will be strongly determined by the stage of historical development of the forces of production. The simplest way of thinking about it is: as technology changes, so do the relations of production. With very primitive agricultural technique, where the only major productive input into the soil is the power of the human musculature, Marx thinks that tends to generate a productive relationship of mastery and slavery — that the most efficient way of maximizing returns is to enclose the labor of a person in their very person, to own that person. In an advanced capitalist society, on the other hand, where one must keep inventories matched to demand, it is no longer

economically necessary or even profitable to own one's laborers. It is better to lease their labor time when it is needed, and when it is not — during a downturn in the business cycle — simply lay them off. That is a more efficient and productive arrangement, and it is a result of the development of the productive forces.

The Base and Superstructure

If we take the sum total of these productive relations within a particular society, Marx says they constitute what he calls the *economic structure* of that society. He calls this structure the *base* or *basis* of the rest of the social structure. The rest of social structure — everything that is not the economic basis, that web of economic relations or relations of production — Marx calls the *superstructure*, which is conceived to be, at least in some sense, epiphenomenal or determined by the economic base.

By superstructure we mean institutions like the state and the church, various cultural mores, habits, and customs, and the various cultural representations found in a society — art, literature, philosophy, and so on. Marx's deep point is that ultimately, at some level, each of these institutions and practices — whether states or works of art — serves to regulate and legitimate the existing relations of production of the economic structure.

This seems counterintuitive, but there are good examples to illustrate what Marx is getting at. Take a cultural phenomenon like sports. Marx would argue that the kinds of sport found in a given society have a great deal to do with the economic base. In a medieval peasant society, where there is very little division of labor and where the basis of communal production is the village itself, we should expect to find sports that celebrate village life and that mode of production. The perfect example is the primitive form of the game we call soccer — football in Europe — in which there is very little

division of labor, everyone kicks the ball, everyone passes the ball, and the players work as more or less an organic whole.

We might think of a capitalist agricultural society producing a game with a somewhat greater division of labor and a degree of individualism — like agrarian America producing baseball, where everyone catches, fields, and bats, yet one person specializes in pitching, another in catching, and so on. And finally, in an advanced industrial society, we would expect to find sports that celebrate factory-style production. American football features an intense division of labor: there are large players who never touch the ball, smaller players who never block, and a specialist who may not even speak English and whose sole job is to kick the ball through the uprights. Moreover, the entire enterprise mirrors the productive hierarchy: each unit of players is supervised by a position coach, all of whom are supervised by a head coach who functions like a factory manager, who is under the control of a general manager who functions like a CEO, who is in turn under the control of the owner of the means of production — the owner of the team.

Marx does not think this is the result of any conspiracy. That is simply what culture does — it celebrates and reflects the life we live, and particularly the economic basis of that life. To give one further example from sport: we play lacrosse, a game originally played by various Native American peoples. We play with one goal — to win — because our economy is based on competition in which the winner takes all. But when Native Americans played the game, they knew in advance who was going to win. Their project was entirely different: the game represented a struggle between the spirits of the dead and the living, and the only way to appease the dead was to ensure that once a year they were allowed to win. So the outcome was known in advance; what mattered was the spirit and manner in which you acted out your role.

Modes of Production

Now, the sum total of the relations of production within a given society, for Marx, corresponds to a particular stage of development of the forces of production — and especially of that technical and applied-science technology. Marx calls the sum totals of these relations an *economic structure* or, in his terminology, a *mode of production*. The best way of thinking about it is that there are certain fundamental forms or stages of production that societies pass through. For Marx, there have in fact been three in the civilized West: the slave mode of production of the ancient or classical world; the feudal or peasant mode of production of the medieval period; and finally, the capitalist mode of production of the modern bourgeois epoch.

The Laws of Historical Development

With this conceptual framework in place, Marx is now in a position to offer the laws he had promised — laws of the development of modes of production based on his own historical researches.

The first law might be stated as follows: every mode of production persists as long as it is capable of fostering the further development of the forces of production. So long as a slave mode of production allows for further development in plowing or harvesting techniques, slavery will continue to persist. It is only when it no longer permits technical development that it becomes historically outdated.

The second law follows from this: when the relations of production or mode of production come to *fetter* or retard the development of the forces of production, a period of social transformation ensues in the form of sharp conjunctures we call revolutions. When a way of organizing society and production actually stands in the way of technological and productive development, it is precisely at those

moments that the existing relations are overthrown in favor of new ones. For example, when the feudal peasant-oriented mode of production actively retards the development of scientific agriculture, that is precisely the moment at which those forms of production will be overthrown. In England, this took the form of mass enclosure and scientific farming, which dispossessed the peasants from the land so that greater productivity could be achieved. Similarly, in industrial societies, relations of personal dependence thwart the development of factory-style production — slaves have no motive to be particularly efficient or careful with labor-saving devices. For precisely that reason, slavery must be abolished and replaced with wage labor, in which workers have an economic incentive to be as productive and careful in their labors as possible.

The third law is that every new mode of production gestates within its predecessor society prior to replacing it. We do not find only one mode of production at any given historical moment — an old society already contains within it the germ of the new mode of production. Where, for example, would we find feudalism before the rise of feudalism? In the march lands of the Germanic peoples at the borders of the Roman Empire. Feudalism might be understood as a synthesis between the warrior culture of the Germanic peoples and the patriarchal slavery and patrimonial domination of Roman villa life, with the synthesis of the two producing something like the feudal ties of vassalage. Feudalism gestated in the march lands of the European Roman Empire, and when that empire finally collapsed, it emerged as the new basis for a new society.

Similarly, the capitalist mode of production gestated in the womb of feudal society. Beginning sometime in the twelfth or thirteenth century, we find the emergence of trading cities — the Hanseatic cities of Germany, the cities of the Champagne fairs in France, Antwerp and later Amsterdam in the north, and Genoa, Venice, and

Siena in the south of Europe. All of these were bourgeois communities — communities of burghers — that existed within the larger structure of feudal domination. When the old feudal structure finally became a relic and was overthrown, what emerged from within it was the already gestated capitalist mode of production.

And this, of course, has important implications for socialism, which Marx would argue gestates within the capitalist mode of production in labor unions, where workers associate on the basis of production and communality. It is there that we find the first seeds of the next organization of the forces of production.

The Dynamics of Capitalism and the Implications for the Present

These laws have profound implications for capitalism in particular, because the capitalist mode of production is the first truly dynamic economic structure in history. Previous economic structures had expanded simply by taking in more territory or more persons. But under capitalism, each laborer becomes more productive through the development of ever more advanced technology. Marx calls this *revolutionizing the means of production*. It is not coincidental that this happens under capitalism: competition demands that each businessman invest in the latest technologies, and moreover that he invest in the research and development of future technologies and labor-saving devices so as to gain a competitive advantage over his rivals. The bourgeois or capitalist mode of production must therefore, by its very nature, revolutionize the means of production and super-develop the productive forces.

This brings us to the final point: what are the implications of historical materialism for the current situation, according to Marx? The bourgeois mode of production expands the productive forces —

science and technology — to the point where it is finally possible to solve the problem of scarcity with which history confronted us at the very beginning. This is because capitalism constantly reinvests in research and development. The problem, however, is that given the disproportionate distribution of incomes under capitalism — where the vast majority of income flows to a small number of people, and the vast majority of workers receive only a very small share — the bulk of the population lacks the financial resources to consume the abundance of goods and commodities that industrial capitalism is capable of producing. The result is periodic crises of underconsumption: factories produce quite efficiently, yet the majority of people lack the resources to purchase those commodities as they are produced. We call these crises recessions when they are moderate, and depressions when they are severe. Marx says they are of the very essence of the competitive dynamics of the bourgeois mode of production.

What we find, then, is that the relations of production — the property relations governing the distribution of income — are coming to fetter the development of the productive forces. When a factory closes during a recession or depression, it is not because it has become less efficient or because it uses energy and labor less effectively than before. It is simply that not enough people have enough money to buy what the factory is producing. The relations of production — the distribution of incomes — are therefore fettering the development of the productive forces. And when that happens, we know, from the second law, what the result will be: a transformation of the mode of production, probably taking the form of a political revolution.

That next transformation is, of course, communism, which Marx sees as the solution to the problem of history. By redressing the problem of disparate incomes, the last fetter on the development of the

productive forces is removed, and the problem of scarcity is solved on a global basis.

For Marx, this is more than just another turn in history. It is a fundamental transformation, because up to this point, human action has been determined in a law-like fashion by scarcity. Once scarcity is resolved, there is nothing left to determine our actions from without. This means that it is through the transformation of the modes of production that we actually achieve the Kantian goal of a kingdom of ends.

After the revolution, after the institution of communism, we face a totally different universe in which we are truly free to follow our will wherever reason leads. In that sense, everything up to communism is what Marx calls the age of heteronomy — or, as he puts it, the age of prehistory. Real history only begins once technology has solved the problem of scarcity. What follows from that is history proper, in which social and cultural development become the unfolding of a free and unfettered human consciousness.

Lecture 55: Marx on Alienation

Professor Dennis Dalton

Karl Marx: Life and Context

Karl Marx was born in 1818 in Germany into a middle-class family. Marx's own ancestry was Jewish — his grandfather was a rabbi, and other members of his family as well. But his father, who influenced him a great deal, had converted from Judaism to Lutheranism a year before Karl was born, apparently in order to improve his law practice. At any rate, his father was determined to make his son Karl a fine lawyer. Marx was an exceptionally bright student who succeeded so well in school that a career in law was certainly well within his reach, but he chose instead to focus on philosophy, and he took his doctorate in that subject in Germany. His family then expected that he would enter academe and prove respectable, but he moved instead into one of the most disreputable areas of occupation — revolutionary thinking and politics. This soon got him exiled not only from Germany but eventually from France as well, and he settled finally in London, the bastion of liberty. He lived there with his family for much of his life, from 1849 until he died in 1883.

In contrast to most other political theorists we study, Marx himself often lived in a state of abject poverty. Other philosophers who identify with the poor are not usually poor themselves, but Marx not only championed the underprivileged — he chose to be one of them. The fact that he chose this way of life makes, I think, an important comment about his theory of alienation. He felt profoundly alienated from the political and economic systems in which he lived, and he wanted desperately to change them.

London is my favorite place in the world. We all have our choice cities, and mine is London — partly because my spouse and I spent our early married years there, raising our family in the 1960s, and we have tried to go back and visit every summer, or every other summer at least. We enjoy it for many reasons, but two among the many are that both Marx and Freud fled to London from persecution and found sanctuary there. As we will see when we turn to Freud, his stay was only for one year at the very end of his life, but both are memorialized there nonetheless. Marx is buried there, and, as we will see in the lecture on Freud, Freud's museum and home are also there.

What I would like you to do on your next trip to London, if you have not already done so, is include a visit to Marx's grave. It might sound a bit morbid to go tramping around cemeteries, but Highgate Cemetery in London is one of the most marvelous scenic spots imaginable. You can take the Northern line, or better yet, walk from central London through the magnificent public squares and parks, through Hampstead Heath — a splendid large park in northern London — that leads to Kenwood House, one of the finest manorial mansions still preserved anywhere in the world, and then across to Highgate Cemetery. It is a splendid morning's walk.

There is an old Highgate Cemetery and a new Highgate Cemetery, and even though Marx was buried in the new Highgate Cemetery when he died in 1883, his tomb is there and it is magnificent. There is a huge granite head of Marx — you may have seen it in any number of films. It is brilliantly depicted in an older British film called *Morgan: A Suitable Case for Treatment*, and in another British film called *High Hopes*. At one point, a Swedish team produced a documentary called *24 Hours at the Tomb of Karl Marx*, showing how many people from all over the world are drawn to this spot. When one goes into the new Highgate Cemetery, the porter is very diligent about directing

you to Marx's tomb among the many that exist there. If asked, he will tell you that ninety-five percent of the people looking for graves have come to see Karl Marx. He is not forgotten in northern London.

As you look at the tomb, notice that inscribed in granite near the head are the words: *Workers of all worlds, unite*. But then in smaller letters around the base of the tomb there is a marvelous inscription from Marx's own writings, from his *Theses on Feuerbach*: "Philosophers have hitherto interpreted the world. The point, however, is to change it." And that is what Marx dedicated his life to — often living in that state of abject poverty with his spouse, Jenny von Westphalen, a wonderful woman who supported him throughout his life and whom he loved completely, and their four children, two of whom died from diseases that could not be treated because of his poverty while the family was living in a tiny set of rooms on Dean Street.

The suffering that family endured was immense, and Marx said after he completed one of his works that he had given up his health, his two dear children, and so much of his family's happiness — all to complete *Capital*. We can certainly ask whether it was worth it. But Marx himself was determined that it was, because he was dedicated to revolutionary change.

We can say that his project seems to have failed, given the events of our own time. We will want to look at that question at the end of this lecture. But should we conclude from that failure that his theory of alienation is invalid? I have chosen to focus on his theory of alienation precisely because I believe it remains quite valid, and we will make that argument especially at the end.

Marx's Theory of Human Nature

Marx's theory of alienation rests first on his theory of human nature. Like Plato, Marx proposed what Plato called a tripartite self — that is, a theory of the human personality having three different aspects, or in Marx's case, three historical categories of needs. Within the self, Marx identifies three distinct sets of needs.

The first is the **natural self**, with its subsistence needs — food, clothing, and shelter — together with a need for sex and a need for productive activity. The natural self is part of us always. Marx says it was not only present in a distant past; it remains with us today, and we continue to have these needs.

These needs are, however, in the process of historical evolution — and here Marx differs fundamentally from Plato. Marx has a theory of the human self evolving through history, so that as needs develop, they are either matured and ripened, or they are perverted and corrupted. As it happens, in the next stage of the self — that is, the **alienated self** — these needs are distorted. The needs for subsistence — for food, clothing, and shelter — are not met in a capitalist economy, Marx says. The need for sex is often distorted by the patterns of domination and submission that prevail between men and women in capitalist economies, where women are subjected as slaves to a wrongful patriarchy. And above all, as we will see in a moment, the need for productive activity — for work, for creative self-expression — is not met. It is distorted in the capitalist economy.

This stage of alienation — the alienated self and the way in which the self in capitalist society is distorted and perverted and its needs left unmet — is the one Marx focuses on most intently.

Marx of course condemns capitalism, this economic system, as the source of these evils — as the reason why the early natural self is not fulfilled. According to Marx, capitalism alienates human beings from

themselves and from one another. Capitalism, and especially private property, perverts human values as people come to value things over one another. It encourages avarice, competition, and inequality. And he says the cash nexus becomes the criterion of all value.

Marx writes a great deal about this. When he condemns the capitalist system, he begins with the alienating power of money. Capitalism, he says, takes our natural need for subsistence and distorts it into an unnatural craving for possession so that no one is ever satisfied — a lust for money, a lust for property, an addiction to things on a level that we cannot possibly need.

In his first major work, the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* — written when he was in exile in Paris in 1844, at only twenty-six years of age — he wrote this about the power of money in a capitalist economy:

The craving for money and property have made us so stupid and one-sided that an object is only ours when we can actually own it, when we have it as capital or actually possess it. All our senses are consumed wholly with having; every sense has been reduced to that.

This means, he argues, that we have collapsed all our human capacities into a single drive — the drive to acquire more things. The cardinal doctrine of capitalism is to deny the authentic needs of the self in favor of acquired, artificial needs. And this means a denial of the real self.

Four years after writing this, at approaching thirty years of age, Marx collaborated with his great friend Friedrich Engels to produce another document that has since become far more famous than the earlier one: the *Communist Manifesto*. There he argued that capitalism must be indicted worldwide, because the bourgeoisie, while creating a revolution in technology and industry, are

simultaneously transforming all values through the omnipotent power of money.

Reading from the *Communist Manifesto*:

The bourgeois class has left remaining no other relation between individuals than naked self-interest or callous cash payment — the cash nexus. Thus traditional values have been drowned in the icy water of egotistical calculation.

In a word, in place of the old forms of exploitation veiled by religious and political illusions, the bourgeoisie has, through the sheer transforming power of money, changed the world economy into naked, shameless, direct, brutal, unforgiving exploitation. The bourgeoisie has stripped of its halo every occupation hitherto honored and looked up to with awe. It has converted the physician and lawyer, the priest, poet, and scientist into mere paid laborers. It has torn away from the family its sentimental veil and reduced the family relation to a mere money relation. And so capitalism enforces patriarchy — the exploitation of women.

The Three Stages of the Self

That story of the horrors of capitalism, from the Marxist point of view, is the story of modernity. And yet the story is not over, because a third stage is coming. As Marx says in the *Communist Manifesto*, this third stage is when the classless, liberated society of communism is born, and the self — having moved through what we might call the childhood phase of the natural self to the adolescent phase of the alienated self — emerges finally into the fully developed, mature stage of what Marx calls the **species self**. This is the self that is able to understand its connections with others, the self that understands that we are all part of one another. And this self will be born in communist society.

Marx believes this will inevitably occur, and his historical determinism is here at its height. He argues in the *Communist Manifesto* that the fall of the bourgeoisie and the rise of communism and the proletariat are equally inevitable. He is an economic determinist in this sense: history has a script, and it will be enacted. Communist society is characterized by equality, true justice, and the evolution of a truly free individual.

Marx's philosophy of alienation thus says most about the middle stage — the alienated self — and least about the communist phase. I think he does not give us enough about what communist society will actually look like. But what he does offer us in extraordinary depth is his analysis of alienated work, which is the central tenet of his theory of alienation.

Alienated Labor

The real transformation that must occur, for Marx, is the transformation from alienated labor in capitalist society to creative and free labor in communist society. It is the alienation of work that he writes on most powerfully — the way in which the system of capitalism fails to fulfill our natural need for satisfying and creative work, for an enjoyable form of productive activity.

Capitalism distorts this need by fostering in us perverse attitudes toward work: either an unnatural attachment to work, a kind of workaholism in which work becomes an addiction, or, on the other hand, a hatred of work born of its boredom. These are the two attitudes toward work bred by capitalism. Either one is unnatural, unfortunate, and distorted. As addicts of work, we are — to use the language of so much of our contemporary sociological literature — overworked Americans. We just cannot leave work alone. And yet

even when we are thoroughly immersed in work, we often hate it because it is ultimately so unsatisfying.

The economic system is the problem here. Because of it, we simply cannot get our work lives right. Whether we experience work with addiction or revulsion, the system has socialized us into driven creatures. This is where Marx's theory of alienation surely applies today. We need and want balanced, healthy lives that allow us to enjoy both our work and our leisure, but what we get instead is alienation from this need — a chronic sense of it being unfulfilled, as when we know that we need a certain nutritious food or a certain kind of love, and yet are left perpetually wanting.

Marx asks what he considers the key question: what constitutes the alienation of labor? And in his early writings, he answers it, I think, eloquently:

First, there is the fact that labor is external to the worker — it does not belong to his essential being. In his work, therefore, he does not affirm himself but denies himself. He does not feel content but unhappy. He does not develop freely his physical and mental energy but mortifies his body and ruins his mind. The worker therefore only feels himself outside his work, and in his work feels outside himself. He is at home when he is not working, and when he is working he is not at home. His labor is therefore not voluntary but coerced — forced labor. It is therefore not the satisfaction of a need but merely a means to satisfy needs external to it. Its alien character emerges clearly in the fact that as soon as no physical or other compulsion exists, labor is shunned like the plague.

He concludes: the worker's activity is not his spontaneous, freely chosen activity. He is driven by it. It belongs to another. It is the loss of his self.

What, then, are we alienated from when we speak of alienated labor? We are alienated from our natural need for satisfying work — our work is, as Marx says, somehow external to our essence. But we are also, Marx says, alienated from our species needs — from our species self — that is, from our higher needs, as yet to be fully known or realized, for what he calls species labor. In Marx's concept of human nature, we evolve through history from the alienated self into the species self. The kind of work we need and want in that higher state is truly creative and imaginative — a form of activity that allows us, Marx says, to see ourselves in what we have produced, and to find continuing enjoyment and satisfaction in that reflection of ourselves in our own world.

Parents often find satisfaction in seeing themselves reflected in their children, just as teachers see themselves reflected in their students or in their students' ideas. This kind of consciousness — this sense of union with one's environment — is only a glimpse, Marx says, of the species society that could be yet to come, when people can demand a form of work that allows them to see themselves reflected in the world they have created.

Marx confidently predicts that this new world will come after capitalism yields to communism. He claims that in this higher stage of historical development — and these are the phrases he uses — the free development of each must be linked to the free development of all, because we cannot be free until all are free. The banner of the communist society he advocates is the famous motto that has been so often cited in socialist economies and states: *From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs*. We want a true fulfillment of the needs of people.

Is Marx Still Relevant?

This is the question we must ask, because after all, the Berlin Wall has fallen. Marx contended that the downfall of capitalism and the rise of communism are equally inevitable, and that premise does not seem quite clear today. It would appear, in fact, that the opposite is true — that capitalism is alive and well throughout the world, and that communism has been demolished. Soviet communism, along with its Eastern European satellites, appears to have been finished. But we need to raise the question: was Marx's system ever tried fairly?

Marx certainly would not have sanctioned the despotic tyranny of Stalinism or the way in which communism was used as a misnomer to describe the economies of Eastern Europe. Marx wanted free and liberated peoples. He wanted justice and equality. He did not want the kind of despotism we found in so many so-called communist states.

In any case, we are concerned here with the United States and with the question of whether Marx's theory of alienation is wrong in our context. I think it can be judged wrong only if and when we are satisfied with our work experiences, instead of complaining widely about how overworked we are. I am thinking of the literature on overworked America — not only from several years ago but in contemporary commentary — in which people observe over and again that money does not buy happiness. The fact that we have to repeat this observation so often indicates that we remain in a state of dissatisfied labor, of alienated work, and that Marx may well be right in his diagnosis of the malaise of American society in this particular respect.

Our economy is certainly flourishing, and yet as individual workers we still seem often deprived of fulfillment. On the question of how money cannot buy happiness, I am thinking of Robert Frank's

splendid book *Luxury Fever*, which I recommend enthusiastically to everyone. Frank, a conservative economist from Cornell, nevertheless concludes that money is being spent in a frenzy — an "affluenza" — throughout the United States, accumulating at unprecedented rates. And yet the society certainly does not seem any more content as a result.

Marx criticized capitalism because he said all human relationships are absorbed into the cash nexus. He claimed that there is no connection between people but naked self-interest and callous cash payment. This is probably an exaggeration now as it was then, but Marx remains important because he continues to raise key questions about us and our society. How far do we define ourselves and our country in terms of cash? Why have we failed to resolve the continuing, worsening problem of the growing income gap between rich and poor? The latest figures indicate that this problem is getting significantly worse, not better — with wealth consolidating among one percent of the population at the top, and deprivation spreading among a large segment of our people at the bottom. Marx would certainly criticize America for this.

We are reminded often enough by our political leaders that life is not fair. But Marx insisted that we focus on the growing injustices in our society and try to make them fair — try to resolve them. If life is unfair, is it the economic system that is to blame? Is the political system — the government — responsible for our injustice and unhappiness? Or is unhappiness somehow inevitably a part of human nature in a way that no changes to the system can possibly touch?

Is unhappiness caused by society and its economy, or by the personality and its instincts, both unconscious and conscious? This is the debate that Marx and Freud join. From Marx's point of view, it is clearly the system — and particularly the capitalist system — that is

to blame. From Freud's point of view, it is the self. That is the question we will take up when we turn to Freud.

Lecture 56: Mill's Utilitarianism

Professor Robert Solomon

John Stuart Mill: Life and Background

John Stuart Mill was the outstanding British philosopher of the nineteenth century. He was a precocious genius. His father was also a philosopher, and Mill was raised on a very strict diet of the classics, of mathematics, and of foreign languages — he was probably one of the best-educated teenagers of his time. But he was so pressured by this upbringing that he had a nervous breakdown around the age of twenty. That crisis got him thinking about the importance of human life and the importance of happiness, and his philosophy is in many ways geared toward an appreciation of those insights.

As a philosopher, Mill belongs to the long tradition of British empiricism, alongside John Locke, Bishop Berkeley, and David Hume. In many ways he was the most thoroughgoing of all of them. He took his logic — which was one of the most outstanding logical systems of the nineteenth century — and pressed it toward a radical empiricist position. Mathematics, for example, he interpreted as an empiricist enterprise, which was very much at odds with the philosophical tradition that had preceded him.

He is perhaps most famous as a social thinker. He wrote a book on liberty that is one of the most celebrated defenses of freedom in the history of political philosophy, and it is upheld and defended by many people today, particularly libertarians. Its central thesis is essentially that people are free and should be allowed to do as they will, so long as they do not interfere with or harm others — a thesis that most Americans would find very congenial today.

He was also an economist who followed Adam Smith and was very much a believer in the free market, though with important qualifications. He would accept that particular economic system only insofar as it could be shown to actually improve the lives of everyone. He was also a precocious defender of women's rights. He was married to a remarkable woman, Harriet Taylor, and together they penned a book called *On the Subjection of Women*. In the nineteenth century, Mill was certainly one of the most persuasive voices in favor of giving women the right to vote and securing for them rights equal to those of men.

What Is Utilitarianism?

In this lecture, what I would like to focus on is Mill's ethics, and in particular the moral philosophy usually called utilitarianism. Utilitarianism is a moral philosophy based on the principle that one should cause the most benefit and the least harm. It is often summarized in the popular slogan: the greatest good for the greatest number. Like virtually everything else in Mill's philosophy, it is based on solid empiricist considerations, because it is through experience that one sees what kinds of consequences follow from what kinds of actions, and whether those consequences are in fact beneficial or harmful. Mill's philosophy is summarized in a pamphlet he published called *Utilitarianism*, and it is really that pamphlet which I am going to be discussing in what follows.

The first thing to say is that Mill did not invent utilitarianism. It is, in fact, a long-standing feature of British moral philosophy. One can trace it back at least to David Hume, who argued that ethics should be based on what he called utility. One might also point to Hume's friend Adam Smith who, in addition to his economic theories, had a series of moral theories in which utility played a central function.

The most important figure in this particular history is Jeremy Bentham, who preceded Mill by a generation or so. It was Bentham who invented what he called the happiness calculus, according to which one could actually sit down and calculate the best course of action based on the amount of pleasure and the amount of harm it caused, as well as the number of people to whom those pleasures and harms accrued. One could also factor in the probability of certain acts causing pleasure or harm, and the proximity — that is, whether the harm or pleasure would occur very soon or further down the line. Bentham sought to reduce ethics to a kind of science. The idea was that it was not a matter of speculation, not a matter of depending on God's will — which could be interpreted in many different ways — and not a matter of using reason alone. Rather, it was a matter of experience.

Bentham's own practical concern was the reform of the still rather barbaric British penal system. These were the days when people were still hanged for stealing a loaf of bread to feed their starving families. What Bentham argued was that punishment should fit the crime in a precise sense: it should inflict just enough pain to offset the pleasure that would be gained by committing the crime itself. He then generalized this theory into a view about ethics in general, and utilitarianism — now properly so-called — was the result.

The most immediate influence on Mill, however, was his own father. James Mill was a friend and associate of Bentham, and he taught Mill the philosophy of utilitarianism at a very early age. But it is Mill, with his great writing abilities and his broader general education, who made the most persuasive case for the philosophy altogether.

I said this is largely a British tradition, but one should note that it certainly spread elsewhere. In France, for example, Voltaire, who had visited England, took utilitarianism very seriously and often deployed it to animate his reformist activism. In Germany, on the other hand,

utilitarianism never caught on. Kant, Hegel, and especially Nietzsche — to name the three most famous — thought it was simply a vulgar philosophy. To talk about utility was, in their view, to completely miss what morality was really about, which had a far higher calling. Or, in the case of Nietzsche, perhaps a far sneakier calling. But in any case, utility was not what morality was about, in the German tradition.

There is a sense in which utilitarianism is perfectly suited to the nineteenth century. It is particularly appropriate, for example, to commercial society, and the Industrial Revolution was already well underway. A society containing a solid middle class of bankers and shopkeepers was well established in England. And when you think about the requirements of utilitarianism — namely, that you should calculate harms and calculate benefits — what is easier to calculate than financial harms and benefits? One can say of utilitarianism that it is the beginning of what we now call cost-benefit analysis, the idea that everything can be converted to some single currency. I use that term metaphorically, but the metaphor very quickly becomes literal, because currency can be converted to money, which is the currency of modern society. In Bentham, this was taken quite literally: when you calculate the happiness calculus and try to figure out the probabilities of harm and benefit, the number of people affected, and so on, you take a straightforwardly quantitative measure.

Mill's Critique of Bentham: Quality vs. Quantity

One of the problems that Mill identifies with Bentham's approach is that it is not at all clear whether pure quantitative calculation captures the kind of thing he wants. You can count the number of people. You can measure the amount of pleasure and pain. You can factor in proximity and likelihood. But still, Mill felt very strongly that something was missing.

There is, for example, the question of distribution and fairness. It is all well and good to say that happiness, or pleasure and pain, should be maximized according to the greatest good for the greatest number. But suppose enormous happiness or pleasure accrues to people who perform some particularly cruel or unfair activity toward some very small minority — where one could calculate that the pleasure gained by the oppressors actually outweighs the pain suffered by the victims. What can utilitarianism say about that? It is not clear. On the question of human rights, Bentham had the rather sarcastic answer that the notion of rights is "nothing but nonsense on stilts" — it simply did not enter into his calculations at all.

On the other hand, the utilitarian idea of maximizing pleasure and minimizing pain led to one very important consequence, particularly in Bentham: a new kind of consideration for animal welfare. Animals had been largely left out of philosophy for much of its history. The idea that animals had anything like rights, or that we owed them utilitarian consideration in terms of their capacity for suffering, had been almost entirely ignored. What Bentham says is that it does not much matter whether an animal can think. The question is whether it can suffer. In a good deal of philosophy — notably in Kant — a being's moral status was largely predicated on rationality: the ability to think, to deliberate, to recognize right from wrong. But Bentham is saying that animals, because they can suffer and presumably also feel pleasure, deserve a certain kind of moral consideration. The animal rights movement dates back to that insight. To name one very contemporary philosopher, Peter Singer follows Bentham in precisely this pursuit of the greatest happiness for the greatest number of sentient creatures.

Mill's utilitarianism, while sharing the basic premises of Bentham's philosophy, goes beyond it in several crucial respects. Most importantly, Bentham's quantitative calculus treats all pleasures as

equivalent, differing only in their quantity. But there is a very real problem with this, because there are pleasures that we would consider vulgar and others that we consider highly desirable. Bentham himself, referring to a rather trivial game of his time, said that pushpin is as good as poetry. In today's terms, bowling is just as good a pleasure as philosophy. Not to knock bowlers, but one wants to make a distinction here — there are pleasures that are of a higher quality than others.

What Mill introduces into his philosophy is therefore the idea of the quality of pleasures. He says, famously, that it is much better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool or a pig satisfied. The distinction he makes he believes can be defended on objective grounds. One might be tempted to say that pleasure is pleasure, and belongs to whomever has it. But when we consider the pig example, we might note that pigs get great pleasure rolling around in the mud, while Socrates takes great pleasure — in a certain sense — tormenting himself with very difficult philosophical puzzles. On what grounds could one possibly say that Socrates' pleasures are of a higher quality than the pig's?

Mill's answer is this: the pig has never experienced Socratic pleasures. The pig has never done philosophy. The pig does not know the joy of working through philosophical quandaries. Whereas Socrates knows both sets of pleasures and chooses what he considers the higher. There is a difficulty with this, and most of you can already figure it out — it is rather doubtful that Socrates ever genuinely experienced pig-type pleasures. Whatever Socrates may have done in the way of vulgar enjoyment, he did it as a philosopher, not as a pig. So there is a genuine question about whether the pig and the philosopher are really in a position where their pleasures can be meaningfully compared. This leads to a broader question about commensurability: how do we know that one person's pleasure is as

great as or less than another person's? How do we know that the quality of pleasure is comparable across different people, let alone across different cultures?

This also raises the question of what exactly utilitarianism is fundamentally about. I have been speaking loosely about pleasures and pains, but of course Mill more often talks about happiness, trying to distance himself from the crude hedonism of Bentham. But is happiness the right concept either? How do you measure people's happiness? How do you know what makes people happy? More recent authors have suggested that what utilitarianism is really about is interests — whose interests are served or harmed — or alternatively preferences — whose preferences are satisfied or frustrated. There is thus a very real and ongoing problem about how we are to talk about utilitarianism: whether in terms of happiness, pleasure and pain, interests, or preferences, and in any case how we are to measure, compare, and find commensurability among these things, both between different people and — even more difficult — between different cultures.

The Two Principles of Mill's Utilitarianism

Mill rests his utilitarianism on two principles. The first is what he calls the principle of utility, which is essentially what we have been discussing: always act for the sake of the greater good, always act so as to maximize pleasure and minimize pain. But this must be coupled with a second principle, which he calls the principle of equality. Following Bentham, he states that each person should count as one and only as one. Utility can be summarized as the greatest good for the greatest number; equality can be summarized as every person counting as just one — meaning that no one, regardless of their status or place in society, has any special claim to greater benefits or

immunity from pain than anyone else. It is, at least on the face of it, a very democratic and egalitarian philosophy.

One can look at contemporary philosophers like Peter Singer, who adopts much of this framework and uses it to arrive at some rather startling conclusions about current ethical problems — issues that perhaps Mill and Bentham never would have imagined. Take, for example, the question of abortion. Singer's view, drawing on Bentham and Mill, is essentially that one must weigh the benefit or happiness that will be enjoyed by a child born perhaps to an unwilling mother against the harm caused if an unwanted child comes into the world — harm to the child, harm to the mother, harm to the mother's family, and perhaps harm to people affected by the child's life later on. This gives some sense of the complications of utilitarian reasoning, because when we are talking about the consequences of actions, they can stretch very far into the future, and it is often very difficult — certainly at the moment of making a decision — to know exactly what those consequences will be. Singer's own conclusion, that there are cases in which abortion is clearly justified, has caused howls of protest, particularly at Princeton where he has taught.

Or take a different and perhaps even more uncomfortable example. Singer points out that if you look at the amount of suffering and starvation in the world and compare it with the rather luxurious lifestyles of even middle-class Americans, then the equality principle — the one-counts-only-as-one principle — suggests that most of us have an obligation to give away most of what we have in order to feed the poor, cure disease, and care for people who are now seriously suffering in other parts of the world. Singer himself, I should say, is an exemplar of this view in practice. But the very real question for all of us is: to what extent can we actually embrace this

philosophy if it is going to cost us perhaps half our income and holdings?

Justice, Virtue, and the Limits of Utilitarianism

The question of fairness I mentioned earlier is a very difficult one. How is happiness to be distributed? It might be that the happiness of a very small number of people is so great that it outweighs small miseries among a larger number, or that the happiness of a large number of people overwhelms the misery of a small number. Critics of utilitarianism have often asked: what prevents a sadist who gets enormous pleasure from torturing others from being justified according to the utilitarian principle, if his pleasure in fact outweighs the suffering caused to his victims?

Mill, I think, has an answer to this, and in the last section of *Utilitarianism* he offers a very elegant discussion of justice and, more broadly, of virtue. On the question of justice, the challenge is always whether the principle of utility coupled with the principle of equality can give us what we want in terms of fairness. The answer often given by critics is no, because all utilitarianism looks at is cumulative harm and cumulative benefit — it does not attend to the particulars of individual cases, whereas justice, in an important sense, must do precisely that.

But here I think we can bring in Mill's important work on liberty, because there, when he discusses the importance of individual freedom, one of the things he makes very clear — in contrast to Bentham and his own father — is the importance of what we would call rights. Mill does not use the language of rights very much, but it is quite clear that his thesis on liberty, that each person should have maximal freedom so long as they cause no harm to others, is very

much a defense of what people today would readily call a theory of human rights.

On the idea of justice, one might say that Mill always tempers what he considers the crude utilitarian calculations of Bentham with considerations of quality. One might say, for example, that while it may give the sadist great pleasure to torture innocent people, the quality of that pleasure is on a very low scale, whereas the quality of the pleasure one gets from giving generously to charity is on a very high scale. To talk about harms and benefits alone is only to tell half the story.

In fact, I would say that when it comes to Mill's discussion of justice and virtue in the final section of *Utilitarianism*, he comes out looking less like a strict utilitarian and more like an Aristotelian. And when you compare Bentham's purely quantitative approach with Mill's emphasis on quality, you can see a further problem: if you introduce a dimension of quality, the scientific ambition of utilitarianism — to have a clear, unbiased, objective way of calculating what one ought to do — becomes very difficult to maintain. If you have an enormous pleasure from some vulgar activity and a modest pleasure from some rather ethereal activity like studying philosophy, how do you compare those? It is rather like comparing basketball scores with baseball scores — the scales are so completely different that it is not clear how to derive any overall verdict.

My own conclusion is that Mill was not deeply committed to the scientific aspect of utilitarianism, but was much more concerned with what Aristotle referred to as the virtues and the general sense of living well in a society in a congenial way. Utilitarianism is part of this picture — it certainly provides a very good rule of thumb for thinking about what you should do and what the consequences of your actions will be. But to care about those consequences requires more than a purely objective view about pleasure and pain. It also requires

a sense of what is genuinely good for people in some larger sense, a strong commitment to education (something Mill was deeply invested in), considerations of fairness, as evidenced by his work on women's liberation, and virtue in particular — because what ultimately gives pleasure, for Mill, is the sense that one is a good person.

When Mill talks in *Utilitarianism* about what he calls the "ultimate sanction," what he really has in mind is something we would call conscience: the idea that when you act wrongly, you feel lousy, and when you act rightly, you feel not necessarily self-righteous, but good about it.

Mill's Legacy

There is an undeniable awkwardness in the fit between Mill's Aristotelian emphasis on virtue and his political liberalism and the economics he defended. But the truth is, Mill saw this awkwardness and took pains to try to make it all work out. With regard to economics in particular, he defended laissez-faire capitalism only insofar as it could be shown to produce the greatest good for the greatest number. He was well aware of the dangers of a widening split between the well-to-do and the badly off, and of the dangers of the absence of social controls on economics. But he maintained, at least until his death, the faith that all of this could be reconciled. Nevertheless, toward the end of his life he turned more and more toward what we would call socialism, because he became acutely aware that if one holds on to the basic utilitarian concepts — the idea that utility should guarantee the greatest good for the greatest number, and that the benefits of society should be more or less equally distributed — then simple laissez-faire capitalism was not going to do the job.

Should we believe in Mill's utilitarianism? Even in the crude form defended by Bentham, I would argue that utilitarianism provides a very important corrective to the kind of self-righteous, a priori philosophizing and moralizing that had preceded it. People who appeal to God's will are very often at odds about what God's will actually is, but what they share in common is an absolute belligerence that their particular interpretation is the way things must be. Utilitarianism says: wait a moment — let us look. Let us see what actually helps people. Let us see what actually harms people.

So too for customary morality — morality handed down from generation to generation. There is often a good deal of wisdom in tradition, and there are probably customs worth maintaining. But there is also a great deal of accumulated cruelty, and we certainly know many cultures, including our own, where things handed down through generations are really just sanctioned modes of harm. Here utilitarianism again provides a corrective, because we can ask: yes, we have done this for fifteen centuries — but can we not now rethink the amount of harm it causes? Or perhaps what served the greatest good for the greatest number in the eighth century A.D. no longer serves the greatest good for the greatest number today, given modern technology and increased lifespans.

When Mill is challenged by those who accuse him of defending an atheistic conception of morality, he has, I think, a very striking answer: there is no reason not to believe in God. But if you do believe in God — if you believe that God loves us and cares about our welfare — then God himself must be a utilitarian too.

Lecture 57: Kierkegaard and the Leap of Faith

Professor Philip Carey

Kierkegaard: Life and Context

Søren Kierkegaard was a nineteenth-century Christian philosopher and theologian in Denmark — and after that, the story gets strange. Kierkegaard was one of the great individualists of the Western tradition, a very unique individual personality in his own right, and he interpreted his own individuality in sharp contrast to his social environment. He was living in a time in Europe that we call Victorianism, taking the term from the period of England under Victoria. But there was a kind of Danish Victorianism as well, with all the complacency and hidden anxiety that characterized that era, and it was against the complacency of both philosophers and pastors that Kierkegaard situated himself in rebellion — as we shall see in a moment. He himself was a lonely man, a profoundly isolated man, who also had deep feelings of attachment to common people. He was profoundly introspective, constantly probing his own individual existence. And that probing of individual existence becomes the source of what is later called existentialism.

Existence — that is, individual human existence — is one of Kierkegaard's favorite philosophical categories. The existence that I myself have to live, as opposed to the existence of a table or a chair or a book: the existence Kierkegaard is concerned with is the existence that each one of us as individuals has to live as our own. He is the first great analyst of that kind of existence, our own existence, the existence that an individual has to live, and that makes him the first existentialist, the founder of existentialism.

The Danish Context: Religion and Philosophy

Let us look more carefully at that setting — the Danish setting of what we might call Danish Victorianism. Religiously, that means that Denmark has an established church, just like Victorian England, except that instead of the Anglican church, it is the Danish Lutheran church, a state church into which you are born. When you are born Danish — unless you are some genuine outsider, like a Jew — you are born Christian. You are born Lutheran. Your birth certificate is your baptismal certificate. In a sense, then, for any respectable Danish person, you are born Christian. It is easy to be Christian. We are all born that way. We are Danish, so we are Christian, are we not? Kierkegaard hated that notion, but that was the context in which he was operating.

Likewise, there was a philosophical context, which in Denmark came mostly from Germany. Denmark is, in a cultural sense, something of an extension of Germany. The Danish language is very similar to German, and Kierkegaard could read German easily. The dominant philosophy was the German philosophy of Hegel. In Hegel, you have this dialectic of history — a philosophical story about the emergence of various forms of consciousness and thought over the course of history, driven by an intrinsic logic that causes these forms of consciousness and knowledge to develop. Christianity, for instance, is one stage of human consciousness that unfolds according to this necessary logical dialectic. For Hegel, moreover, Christianity is the highest phase of religious consciousness — higher than Judaism, which is higher than paganism, which is higher than animism. There is a whole progress of religious consciousness which culminates, of course, in Christianity.

After Hegel, the Hegelian tradition splits into two camps. There are the left-wing Hegelians who reason that since religion is a form of oppression and Christianity is the highest form of religion, once we

abolish Christianity, we will arrive at real freedom. Karl Marx was a left-wing Hegelian who worked in that context, as a follower of Feuerbach, the great left-wing Hegelian. But the right-wing Hegelians — let us call them Victorian Hegelians — were dominant in Denmark. They thought: Christianity is the highest form of religion, and therefore the highest form of popular consciousness. But we philosophers, of course, go beyond that. We penetrate further, into a philosophical understanding of the secret philosophical meaning of Christianity. We go beyond all the picture-thinking and the mythology. There is a kind of demythologizing program here, though the term had not yet been invented. What Christianity thinks of in pictorial or mythological terms, the philosophers think of in philosophical concepts. And that notion of going beyond faith — beyond Christian faith — to a philosophical understanding is another one of Kierkegaard's targets. He hates that notion, because he thinks that if we could only get to faith, we would be in great shape. But instead, these philosophers always want to go further.

Here again, then, we have a cultural context in which, in a sense, it is easy to be a Christian. There are philosophers giving lectures, explaining the whole history of human thought and showing that Christianity is the culmination of religious consciousness. All you have to do is go to the lecture and listen to the philosopher prove the truth of Christianity. Kierkegaard thinks that is ridiculous. He is a great satirist of that kind of religiosity — the religiosity of people who listen to lectures and say, "Ah, the professor has proved it. I believe it. Christianity. All right, I'm a Christian." I was born in Denmark. I listened to the philosopher's lecture. That is all I need to do to be a Christian.

Making Faith Difficult — and Therefore Possible

Kierkegaard tried to make it hard to be a Christian rather than easy. What he was trying to do was make faith possible by making it difficult. Because once Christian faith becomes so easy that being Danish is equivalent to being Christian, or listening to a philosophy lecture is equivalent to being a Christian, faith becomes virtually impossible. Real faith — a faith that clings to God in the depths — is impossible for someone who is merely a secondhand Christian in the easy way that Victorian Denmark made so readily available. Kierkegaard's project can therefore be called the project of making faith more difficult, and thereby making it genuinely possible. Because real faith is a difficult thing which requires all of yourself. Your whole existence is thrown into faith — unlike the philosopher who lectures on the whole history of the universe while somehow forgetting his own existence. It is a peculiar kind of absent-mindedness: the philosopher who explains the entire universe and leaves out his own existence. Kierkegaard wrote a roughly five-hundred-page satire on that peculiar absent-mindedness. He called it the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*.

The point, in one way or another, is that you are not going to get to faith by simply accepting what philosophers or even pastors do for you — by listening to magnificent, beautiful speeches that allow you to forget that faith is really a responsibility of your own existence, not theirs. The objective truth that a professor will prove in a lecture is also not going to help you get to faith. It means only that "it is the objective truth, so it must be true, so I suppose I am a Christian." No — it does not work that way.

What is needed is what Kierkegaard will call the inner movement of faith — the leap of faith, as he calls it in certain places. And that is where we get the notion of the leap of faith from. Kierkegaard is hostile to the project of proving the truth of Christian faith, not

because he thinks that Christian faith is irrational, and not because he thinks that it cannot be proved. He is worried that there are professors proving it all over the place, and it does none of them any good in terms of arriving at real faith.

So Kierkegaard has acquired the reputation, among contemporary philosophers, of being what is called a fideist. That is a term derived from the Latin word *fides*, meaning faith, so fideism is, so to speak, faithism. It is the label that many philosophers like to paste on a theologian who believes in faith rather than reason — as if Kierkegaard were saying, "It is all a matter of faith; let us forget about reason and leap irrationally into the dark." That, I think, is an unfair portrait of Kierkegaard. He does not think that Christian faith is irrational. He just thinks that all this ratiocination and reasoning that goes on with all these professors and pastors does not help in getting to faith. What is needed is the passionate inwardness of grasping the object of faith when reasons do not seem sufficient. Because if reasons do seem sufficient, then it is no longer a task for your own existence — you just listen to what the professor says. It is only when reasons no longer seem sufficient to you that faith can be this act of your own passionate inwardness. So Kierkegaard wants to take away the easy reasons for being a Christian, in order to make it more difficult to be a Christian — and thus to make it possible.

The Strategy of Indirect Communication

In order to do this, Kierkegaard had to develop a very peculiar strategy of communication. He could not simply go on lecturing about it, just like the professors, and say, "You must grasp faith in passionate inwardness." Because that becomes just one more form of consciousness that can be written up in a paragraph and placed into a system by a Hegelian philosopher. In fact, that has actually

happened to Kierkegaard — he has been given his place in history, labeled a fideist and an individualist, and his philosophy has been summarized in a couple of paragraphs and inserted into a history of philosophy. How ironic. But Kierkegaard knew this would happen.

If you really want to encounter Kierkegaard, you have to read his own works and listen to this solitary individual trying to speak to your solitary individual existence. Part of what Kierkegaard does in order to make faith more possible by making it more difficult is to develop a strategy of what he calls indirect communication. He is not going to lecture. He is not going to preach. What he is going to do is write in pseudonyms.

Before going further, I must mention a crucial confrontation that he discusses in the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, between a man named Lessing — an eighteenth-century philosopher, an ironic and skeptical wit — and a good, earnest philosopher named Jacobi, the archetypal lecturer. Jacobi is the one who urges Lessing to make the leap of faith. Lessing is saying, "Oh, there is this big, broad, ugly ditch that I simply cannot get across, to get from my own beliefs now to Christian faith." And Jacobi says, "Make the leap. Make the leap. Just do it. All you have to do is make that leap." And Lessing replies, "Ah, my bones are a little too old for that leap. My legs don't have the flexibility to make that leap, dear Jacobi." And Kierkegaard admires Lessing rather than Jacobi.

Kierkegaard is not going to play Jacobi's role and say, "Oh, take the leap of faith — it is easy, just take the leap." No. The leap of faith is very, very difficult, and Kierkegaard appreciates anyone who is willing to make it difficult. So when he tries to show us the leap of faith and show how difficult it is, he does not do it in the lecturing style of Jacobi. He does it by writing books under false names. For most of his early career, he published books under pseudonyms. His famous

early book *Fear and Trembling*, for instance, is published under the name Johannes de Silentio — John of the Silence.

Abraham and the Leap of Faith

Fear and Trembling is a meditation on the faith of Abraham, who makes the leap of faith. It is all about how difficult it is for us, with our old legs, to jump across that great ditch. Let us think about the story of Abraham — the story of Abraham and the sacrifice of Isaac. Just to refresh your memory: here is Abraham, who has been promised that he will be the father of a great nation. After years of waiting, he finally has a son who will be his heir, and the son is growing up. Then along comes God to test Abraham and says, "Abraham." Abraham replies: "Here I am" — that great Hebrew gesture of presenting oneself before God. And God says, "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to Moriah and sacrifice him as a burnt offering."

What does Abraham do? He gathers wood for the burnt offering, takes his son Isaac, and they set out on a three-day journey to Mount Moriah. But he does not tell Isaac what is going on — and this is a key point that Kierkegaard finds deeply fascinating. Abraham never seems to have told anyone about this divine command or about his obedience to it. As they travel, Isaac asks, "Where is the lamb for the burnt offering, father?" And Abraham says, "God will provide a lamb, my son." And that is as much as Abraham ever says about his faith. He does not lecture about it. He does not preach about it. He does not deliver a half-hour sermon on the importance of faith. He simply says: "God will provide the lamb." That is as much as he can communicate about the inward movement of his own existence in faith. And, of course, they arrive at Mount Moriah. He binds his son, places him on the wood — and the angel comes and says, "Abraham,

Abraham." "Here I am." "Do not lay a hand on the boy. Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only beloved son."

So Abraham gives up everything — he is giving up Isaac, giving up everything — and he gets it all back. That is the crucial moment. Faith, Kierkegaard says, has to be strong enough to be willing to receive everything back after having given it all up.

This is an astonishing thing, and it is beyond what the philosophers and preachers can tell us about. The Hegelian philosophers want to write up Abraham's faith, put it in a paragraph and a history of philosophy, and then move on. Johannes de Silentio says: if I could only get to Abraham's point, I would be very, very happy. How these philosophers manage to go even further, he says, I cannot imagine. They are beyond me. Let us just stay with Abraham — that is enough. And the preachers who preach about him so sentimentally and enthusiastically, as if it were such an easy and lovely thing to do what Abraham does — they do not know what they are talking about. They leave out the fear and trembling of the book's title. They leave out the dread, the *angst* — that German and Danish word for anxiety and dread. They leave out all the passionate inwardness of Abraham's decision of faith. Of course, Abraham does not tell us about it. He is not a preacher or a philosopher. He cannot tell us about it. All he can do is live it. His own existence is this obedience of faith.

Johannes also says that he is disgusted by the attempt to speak of this great deed as though the thousands of years separating us from Abraham made some decisive difference. Abraham existed roughly three thousand years ago — does that make him merely a figure from history, a hero of faith but someone we cannot truly emulate because we live in modern Denmark? No, says Johannes. That is disgusting. There is no distance between us and Abraham that

matters, other than the greatness of his faith. That is something we must confront in our own existence. We cannot escape it, and we cannot go further. There is no going further. Reason, which the philosophers love and which always wants to press ahead, may wish to go beyond Abraham — but it is quite enough for me simply to get to where Abraham is.

The Knight of Infinite Resignation and the Knight of Faith

In the story of Abraham, Kierkegaard distinguishes two figures: the knight of infinite resignation and the knight of faith. The knight of infinite resignation is someone who is willing to give up everything for God — to give up all finite goods for the sake of the infinite good of eternal happiness. In many ways the great knight of infinite resignation is Socrates, whom Kierkegaard admires profoundly. The whole Platonic tradition gives up fleshly things — things of this world, the sensible world — in order to find itself in eternal truth. So, giving up all finite things, the knight of infinite resignation seeks an eternal truth outside of this world.

Johannes says: I can understand the knight of infinite resignation. That is awfully difficult, but Socrates was there and Plato talked about all this. I can understand it. You give up Isaac and simply hope for an eternal future instead of a future on earth. Or, as Kierkegaard himself did, you give up your fiancée — because Kierkegaard believed that God had vetoed his engagement to a lovely young woman named Regine. Kierkegaard felt he could not marry her without opening himself to her completely, and he could not do that, so he had to let her go. He made it easy by breaking off the engagement in a way that made him look like a scoundrel, so that she would find it easy to end things with him. She was his Isaac,

whom he sacrificed. That is one of the hidden subtexts of *Fear and Trembling*: Kierkegaard himself had to play the role of knight of infinite resignation and found it terribly difficult, and found himself astonished that Abraham could go beyond that point to become a knight of faith.

The knight of faith is someone who gives up everything, gives up all the things of this world — and then expects to receive it all back. Above all, he gives up Isaac because God says, "Give this finite good up for my sake, the infinite good." But Abraham expects Isaac back. Kierkegaard is drawing here on a passage in the New Testament, in the book of Hebrews, where the faith of Abraham is praised: "By faith Abraham, when tested, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his only begotten son, even though God had said to him, 'It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.' But Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from the dead."

The faith of Abraham is therefore like faith in resurrection — and it is specifically Christian. Remember, Socrates did not actually believe in resurrection. He believed that when you die your soul goes to a kind of heaven — which is good enough, but there is no resurrection. The finite person does not come back. The soul goes to infinity. Whereas Abraham expects this finite being back. He is going to give Isaac up, sacrifice him, and receive him back — just as Christians expect that this one person, Jesus of Nazareth, will come back, and that in grasping hold of this one finite being by faith, one finds all infinite happiness. Christian faith thus goes beyond infinite resignation. It goes beyond the hope of going to a Platonic heaven where you leave finite goods behind and arrive at eternal truth. It grasps hold of a finite being and says: this is my happiness.

The test for Abraham's faith, Kierkegaard thinks, is that he was able to receive Isaac back with joy. Imagine having given up everything — having gone through the incredible inward turmoil of resignation and renunciation, having abandoned all hope for anything in this world and placed all your hopes in heavenly glory. And then suddenly, all at once, this earthly good returns to your hands. It is like someone who has given everything up to become a monk, entered the monastery — and then all of a sudden gets married and has children and is supposed to love them. Do you have the capacity for joy at that moment? To receive the finite good back and say, "Yes, this is what I wanted all along, and I knew this is what God intended"? That is faith. It goes beyond infinite resignation. It goes beyond the kind of Platonic spirituality of the knight of infinite resignation.

Contemporaneity with Christ

You can see now how the faith of Abraham becomes a model for Christian faith in Kierkegaard's account. Because when Christian faith comes under discussion for Kierkegaard, there is the same issue of temporal distance — a distance of nineteen hundred years in Kierkegaard's time. Here we are, trying to be Christians in Denmark, and Jesus existed nineteen hundred years ago. The philosophers have to tell us a story about how human consciousness dialectically develops from Jesus' time to ours. If we are going to know anything about Jesus, we have to know it through the systems of the philosophers. No, says Kierkegaard. What Christian faith is, is contemporaneity with Christ — to be a Christian is to exist simultaneously with Jesus, in the same time frame, with those nineteen hundred years simply abolished. Faith means taking hold of this one person not through the mediation of a great philosophical system, not through the mediation of some sermon that explains it

all, but through this immediate relationship with Christ in whom one finds one's eternal happiness.

The way Kierkegaard approaches this is by comparing us to the original disciples. Surely the original disciples had an easier time believing than we do — they actually saw the man? But Kierkegaard says no, they were no better off. In fact, they actually saw this man standing right before them and somehow managed to believe he was God. That is Christian faith, Kierkegaard says, and it is no more difficult for us. Maybe it was even more difficult for them, to see the man right there — like Abraham seeing Isaac — to see the man right there and say, "Here is my eternal happiness. This one man." So we are really in the same situation as the original disciples. Those nineteen hundred years make no ultimate difference. You do not need philosophy lectures about the history of philosophy or the philosophy of history in order to grasp this point. There is Jesus. There is eternal happiness. One man, one finite being. This is an offense to reason, a paradox, a scandal. Philosophers cannot possibly accept it, because reason wants an eternal, infinite truth that explains everything — and faith wants just this one man, Jesus. Reason wants to go beyond that. Kierkegaard says it is already enough work for me simply to get to that modest point of believing in this one man. But it is a scandal, a paradox, and an offense to reason. And Kierkegaard glories in this paradox, insists upon it. If you want to be a Christian, you have to get there by passing through this offense, this scandal. Reason and all of its explanations of the whole world will not help you. If that is what you want, go listen to lectures. But if you want faith, you have to go to this one man.

The Dialectic of Existence: Stages on Life's Way

That is the source of the inwardness of faith — something Kierkegaard is very deeply interested in. To describe it, he develops what has been called a dialectic of existence. Dialectic, recall, is a Hegelian notion — this idea of a necessary unfolding of reason and consciousness. Marx takes it and makes it a dialectic of the material unfolding of social conflict. Kierkegaard takes it and describes it as the unfolding of the inwardness of individual existence. He describes various stages on life's way — indeed, that is one of his book titles — and these are stages on the way to faith that unfold through what he calls a dialectic: a dialectic of paradox, a dialectic of negation, a dialectic which deepens you in inwardness as you more passionately approach the possibility of faith.

Let us trace some of the stages on life's way in this dialectic of existence. You start with the aesthetic stage — the stage of basically pursuing pleasure. In his great book *Either/Or*, arranged in two volumes, Kierkegaard portrays the aesthetic stage in the first volume as basically a wild student life: a young man pursuing pleasure, pursuing literary thrills, and in the end finding that it is not satisfying — that it is in fact ultimately boring. There is a kind of despair at the highest point of the aesthetic stage which leads one toward the ethical stage.

The ethical stage is the stage of marriage, the stage that Kierkegaard found he could not quite reach himself. It is a stage of marriage and repentance — you repent yourself out of your aesthetic stage, out of this student life, and become a good, solid, married citizen. This stage is represented by another pseudonym, a character called Judge William, who writes a long treatise on the importance and the aesthetic validity of marriage — on why marriage does not simply abolish the aesthetic but incorporates it into a life that is ethical and good, but also beautiful and satisfying. Pleasure does not disappear

in marriage; it is incorporated into something larger and better. It is a very congenial sort of move.

But things do not stop there. Above the ethical stage, there is a religious stage. In his later works, after *Either/Or*, Kierkegaard has a great deal to say about this religious stage. He identifies two sub-stages within it. Religiousness A is basically equivalent to the stage of the knight of infinite resignation — a kind of Platonic or Socratic religion of infinite truth. And then there is Religiousness B, where one finds an infinite or eternal happiness in a finite thing, by faith in Christ — that paradox of seeking the infinite in the finite, which is only possible if Christ is God incarnate.

Now, that is a very brief sketch of a very complicated development. Kierkegaard spends immense ingenuity describing how one moves from one stage to the next, and what it is like inwardly to make that movement. Really, the crucial thing about these stages is the transition from one to another — and the fact that this transition is always a matter of decision, of an inward movement of your own existence. It is not simply growing up. It is making a decision that is preceded by anxiety and hindered by despair. Hence, Kierkegaard writes a book called *The Concept of Anxiety* — the concept of *angst* — and another book on despair called *The Sickness unto Death*. Despair is the sickness unto death. Despair is what happens when you cannot make the transition to the next level and get stuck where you are. If you are stuck at the aesthetic stage and cannot get to the ethical stage, you are stuck with aesthetic despair, which is boredom. And Kierkegaard has some marvelously, uproariously funny descriptions of boredom at the aesthetic level.

The dialectic in Kierkegaard's notion of the dialectic of existence is not a necessary process, as it is for Hegel and Marx. It is a process that leads you to a point of decision where you have to make the leap to the next level. That leap to the next level is never a necessary

process of reason. It is always a decision made in passionate inwardness.

Truth as Subjectivity

One way of summarizing all of this for Kierkegaard is through one of his most famous sayings: truth is subjectivity. The truth that matters for you is the truth you embrace in passionate inwardness, the truth that develops you in this dialectic of existence. Here is another definition from Kierkegaard: faith is an objective uncertainty held fast in passionate inwardness — the sort of thing that never happens when a philosopher is lecturing, but does happen when you seek an ultimate happiness in one finite being.

This process is double-sided. It gets you closer to God. But also — and this is Kierkegaard's main interest in many ways — it changes you. It changes your own existence. As you make this dialectical development toward faith, you become, as Kierkegaard will say, a self before God. As you get closer and closer to faith — and perhaps none of us ever quite gets there — we become a self before God. We present ourselves in this dialectical development before God. As Abraham said: here I am.

Lecture 58: Schopenhauer — The World as Will and Representation

Professor Kathleen Higgins

Life and Influence

In terms of his influence, Arthur Schopenhauer was one of the most important philosophers of the nineteenth century. He was a major influence on Nietzsche, Wittgenstein, and Freud, to name just a few. But who was he?

He was born in 1788 and lived until 1860. He was the son of a wealthy merchant, and his mother was a famous novelist in her own right. Despite the fact that she introduced him to some of the most important people in Europe, thereby advancing his career, Schopenhauer never got along with her very well. Some people speculate that some of his notoriously misogynistic remarks have much to do with the particular nature of that relationship.

It was not his mother alone, however, with whom he failed to get along. He was notoriously a contrarian — so much so that despite not holding an official university position, he nevertheless decided to teach at a university in direct competition with Hegel, scheduling all of his classes at exactly the same times as Hegel's, thereby ensuring that he would have none of Hegel's students in his own classes. What he actually ensured was that he had no students in his classes at all. Fortunately, he was independently wealthy, and perhaps this had something to do with the curmudgeonly stance he affects throughout his writings.

His major work followed his dissertation, which was based on the fourfold root of the principle of sufficient reason — indeed, that was its topic, and I will have more to say about the principle of sufficient

reason shortly. His major work itself was called *The World as Will and Representation*, and in it, it becomes obvious that Schopenhauer did at least genuinely admire three major thinkers from across world civilization. The most important influence in terms of German philosophy was Immanuel Kant. Schopenhauer took over a number of Kantian ideas, turning them to his own uses and employing Kant's basic scheme as an argument for pessimism — something it is hard to imagine Kant would have been very happy about.

His other major Western hero was Plato, whom he sometimes calls "the Divine Plato." However, Schopenhauer is important precisely because he turned his sights beyond Western philosophy. He was probably the first major Western thinker to pay serious attention to Indian philosophy, and indeed some of his insights are drawn directly from Buddhism. His third hero, accordingly, is the Buddha.

These three influences become, as I say, very important throughout *The World as Will and Representation*. Although that work went through a number of editions in his lifetime, Schopenhauer mainly added to it by way of further examples illustrating his points. Indeed, he takes some pride in one of the prefaces to a later edition in saying simply: "I have changed nothing."

The World as Representation

According to Schopenhauer's scheme, the world has two aspects. His very first statement, opening the book, is: "The world is my representation." What Schopenhauer means by this is that the world as we know it depends entirely on our consciousness. The world that we understand in our everyday sense is something that consciousness has to present to us. As he puts it, the world hangs by a single thread — the consciousness in which it exists. In other words, there is not a kind of reality that straightforwardly

corresponds to the world that we think we know. It is our own minds that give it the shape it has.

This was hardly a startling claim for Schopenhauer to make, given that Kant's own theory — which held that the formulating categories of the mind shape the world as we know it — had already managed to convince virtually everyone in Germany of its truth. Schopenhauer was in this respect simply going along with the basic idea held by everyone of his generation. Nevertheless, what he chose to do with it is quite striking. For him, this basic point — that the world is my representation — simply meant that he was an idealist rather than a realist, that the world as we see it is a function of the way our minds put it together. Consciousness and matter, as he puts it, are direct correlates: they are the framework on which everything we come to know is constructed.

The World as Will

The world that we come to know is, from Schopenhauer's point of view, distorted in certain ways. His claim is that ultimately Kant is right to say that there is a thing-in-itself — some reality that is over and above, and indeed is the fundamental basis of, the reality we observe. That fundamental reality, according to Schopenhauer, is will.

Schopenhauer talks about will as though it is a kind of unified, if self-contradictory, reality underlying everything. It is somewhat difficult, I think, for us to grasp what he means when he claims that will is the fundamental reality behind rocks as well as ourselves. His suggestion, however, is that we introspect and notice that the self as it appears to us from within — what makes us individually different from everything we merely observe — is this kind of internal, passionate, driven self. That, he claims, is the will. If the rest of reality has the same status that we individually do, it must, from his point of view,

essentially be will as well. So even though he is not claiming that rocks and such are conscious, he is claiming that there is an inner side to them that is akin to the inner side of ourselves. Will is the term he uses to name this.

The Principle of Sufficient Reason

Despite the fact that will is the fundamental reality, Schopenhauer insists that the phenomena — the things we observe, which will in a sense invents — are internally related to each other in a very orderly, if conflicted, way. Each type of thing relates to every other type of thing, first of all, through what he calls the principle of sufficient reason. He characterizes it at one point as follows: every possible object stands in a necessary relationship to other objects, on the one hand as determined, on the other hand as determining. What this means is that there is a sufficient reason in other things, within the realm of phenomena, for each particular thing. Nothing stands on its own; nothing is, in fact, thinkable without the entire rest of reality.

That basic principle allows him a way of explaining how the order we observe — and attempt to make sense of through science — comes about. There are necessary connections between various things in the world, and one can go further and say that there are various types of things that interrelate in an orderly fashion. Despite this, however, individual entities tend to stand in a relationship toward each other that is anything but enjoyable. Essentially, everything within the world defends itself against other entities and feeds itself on other entities, and this basic interconnection or nexus in which all things are united is not something that gives joy or satisfaction to the individual entities. Most individual entities are in a rather miserable condition, and I will have more to say about that shortly.

Plato and Natural Kinds

This helps us to see why Plato plays such an important role for Schopenhauer. According to him, one of the most important things Plato observed is that the apparent world is not the entirety of reality — that there is a higher plane in which one can discern the prototypes on which individuals seem to be modeled. The realm of the Forms, or as it is sometimes translated, Plato's Ideas, are according to Plato the basic prototypes for each type of thing. If you want to understand the way in which things in nature are organized or relate to one another, it makes sense to talk about natural kinds. Some natural kinds, for instance, depend biologically for their existence on certain amounts of air, water, and so on — and, particularly relevant for Schopenhauer's purposes, they depend heavily on feeding on other kinds of beings.

According to Plato, reason allows us to recognize that individual things are not unique, but are instead instances of natural kinds that can be explained in fairly orderly ways. And what is particularly important for Schopenhauer is that this insight into the prototypes of things in the world allows us to lift our attention away from particular situations and toward a more universal plane. Plato's own view was that the wise would attend to the Forms — paying more attention to the kinds of things and the universal principles thus made available to understanding than to the particular practical details of their own situation. Schopenhauer thought that was really the ideal thing for human beings to do as well.

Pessimism

This brings us to the point of Schopenhauer's pessimism. Schopenhauer is notoriously pessimistic, though I think his style of pessimism was more the style of a curmudgeon than that of an

extremely depressed individual. To give you an example, here is a passage from his major work:

The life of every individual, viewed as a whole and in general, and when only its most significant features are emphasized, is really a tragedy. But gone through in detail, it has the character of a comedy. For the doings and worries of the day, the restless mockeries of the moment, the desires and fears of the week, the mishaps of every hour, are all brought about by chance that is always bent on some mischievous trick. They are nothing but scenes from a comedy. Thus, as if fate wished to add mockery to the misery of our existence, our life must contain all the woes of tragedy, and yet we cannot even assert the dignity of tragic characters, but in the broad detail of life are inevitably the foolish characters of a comedy.

I think that is, in its way, a rather funny, biting, almost satirical observation about everyday life. Most of the time we would like to think of ourselves as tragic heroes — and indeed the serious vulnerabilities we have, such as our recognition that we are going to die, certainly give us some warrant for wanting to look at ourselves that way. But when we think about the details that actually fill our lives, what we mostly come to is something closer to a sitcom.

Schopenhauer's whole theory of the will he sees as a basis for pessimism — not only about the glory or inglory of our everyday lives, but about our whole position in the scheme of things. Everything that lives, according to Schopenhauer, is troubled. This he takes over from the Buddha, and essentially what Schopenhauer does is re-argue for the Four Noble Truths of Buddhism with his own particular spin.

The first of these — that life is troubled — is something he thinks he has more than enough evidence for. If his first edition does not provide enough, he supplies several further editions, offering

additional examples of just how miserable the situation of most living things actually is. Human conflict is particularly good evidence for this, but if one also considers the food chain, the desperate efforts of animals attempting to reach a certain place in order to lay their eggs, and all the crises produced in consequence, Schopenhauer thinks that if you simply look around, the principle is really quite evident.

The Diagnosis: Desire and Craving

The solution to this troubled condition, following the Buddha, is to recognize that the trouble is caused by selfish craving — by desire. Schopenhauer thinks that because we are all phenomenal manifestations of will, and because the reality behind us is always will, desire is simply part of our nature. So how do we overcome it? According to the Buddha, we overcome it by overcoming selfish desire. If one ceases to crave selfishly, one ceases to have the suffering that comes from craving.

Schopenhauer agrees with this, but one can already see that there is a real problem here. If what we essentially are is will, and if the only way to overcome the crises and troubles of life is to stop willing, what is one to do? His solution — his version of the Fourth Noble Truth — is that one must resign oneself and renounce the will.

In a way, this sounds like a project that is not going to be very easy. And indeed, Schopenhauer would not claim it is easy. He acknowledges that it is very rare for someone truly to renounce the will. But it has actually happened — it has happened in the case of saints belonging to virtually all traditions. What a saint does is recognize that there is no gain to be had in craving things selfishly in competition against other beings. Being in competition with others, as most human beings are, is according to Schopenhauer something

we are driven to by the will — but it will not advance us at all. If one really understands this — that is, if one takes it to heart rather than merely grasping it as an intellectual point — what it does is undercut the motivation to keep struggling, to keep trying to find what one thinks one wants, because in fact nothing is really going to satisfy us.

There is, however, an obvious paradox. You cannot try very hard to renounce the will. You cannot attempt to stop willing as a deliberate act of will, because if you try very hard you are simply adding to your own willfulness and directing it in a new direction. So what is usually required to become a saint is not really trying hard not to will — which is self-defeating — but instead reducing one's desire to will through various ascetic practices. When saints of certain traditions fast, for example, what they do is basically undercut the strength of the physical objectification of the will in ourselves — namely, our bodies. By undercutting a certain vitality of the body, less energy, in a sense, is put into the whole project of willing. And that is what is reasonable in all those various traditions of ascetic practice.

Bertrand Russell points out that it is a bit ironic for Schopenhauer of all people to be making this case, because in fact he was very far from an ascetic himself. Not only did he have a number of fairly passionate love affairs, but he also, as Russell puts it, dined regularly at a fine restaurant. So one wonders whether Schopenhauer is the best person to be offering this kind of solution. Indeed, Schopenhauer did not claim to be someone who had himself succeeded at sanctity, though he thought it a good idea. He recognizes that most people are not going to end up as saints, and he rather succinctly sums up the general human condition: "The life of human beings and animals swings like a pendulum to and fro between pain and boredom, and these two are in fact its ultimate constituents." Despite the fact that he was himself perhaps an

exceptionally willful individual, he thought it only a question of degree — that he was, in the end, fairly representative of humankind.

Aesthetic Experience as Temporary Reprieve

So if most people are not going to take the route of sanctity, are not going to subject themselves to ascetic practices, what is the solution? The solution is something that is really only temporary for most people — but this does explain why Schopenhauer places such important emphasis on aesthetic experience, both in his own life and in his philosophy. Aesthetic experience — as opposed to ascetic practice — is the kind of experience one has in connection with beauty and art. Indeed, a full quarter of Schopenhauer's book is devoted to the nature of aesthetic experience. Aesthetic experience, from his point of view, is the Sabbath from the penal servitude of willing.

What does he believe? Essentially, his claim is that in the aesthetic, we take joy in simple appearances. We can enjoy, for instance, the beauty of a sunset or the beauty of the lines of a mountain. When we do that, we are not in our usual mode of practical willing. We are not, in looking at the sunset, devising an agenda in which that sunset plays a role. We are not thinking: how can this advantage me? Is this interfering with me in some way? — the attitudes we take most of the time toward virtually everything. Instead, we simply enjoy contemplating the object for its own sake.

In that condition, according to Schopenhauer, the individual becomes what he calls "the pure will-less subject of intellect." The pure will-less subject here is the self — but the self without practical consideration. One becomes, in a sense, a universal manifestation of human intelligence when one contemplates the sunset. In this respect, he is following Kant more or less, for Kant claimed that what

we enjoy in aesthetic experience is really the intellectual faculties of our own mind, and that these faculties take a certain pleasure in simply contemplating, precisely because this situation is divorced from practical agendas of any sort.

So for Schopenhauer, following Kant, the mind becomes pure and will-less. Essentially, as long as we are enjoying contemplation, we are ignoring the usual pressures of the day that require us to work for a living and so forth. At the same time, the object we contemplate also undergoes a kind of transformation toward universality. We start to see the object not as this specific thing in front of us — not as this or that particular tree with its particular set of needs — but as an instance of the universal. We are lifted from the everyday world to the realm of Platonic Ideas.

What happens, accordingly, is that the whole operation of contemplating becomes a matter of seeing the universal on both sides of the subject-object relationship. The subject is now a universal manifestation of human intellect devoid of will, and the object itself is a manifestation of the universal type of thing. So, as Schopenhauer says in one passage, it does not matter whether the beautiful tree we contemplate is the one here in front of us now or one that bloomed a thousand years ago. Essentially, it is the same experience.

Schopenhauer thinks this has a kind of spiritual importance because it gives us a genuine glimpse of the true nature of things. Most of the time we are caught up in the pragmatics of our relationship to individual things around us. Either these things are things we want, or things we want to be removed from. Other individuals are either people that can help us, people we want to associate with, or people who are hindering us in some way. The consequence of all of this, according to Schopenhauer, is an essentially continual struggle among human beings — what Hobbes called a war of all against all.

In the arts, however, and in aesthetic experience of nature, we drop all of that for the time being and simply enjoy reality as a human being — in this particular shape of the Platonic Idea.

According to Schopenhauer, the Platonic Idea is a mode of the will's objectification in its finest form. The will manifests itself according to natural kinds, as I mentioned before — there are types of things that the will has in a sense chosen to invent. But these types of things are fully and perfectly manifested only in the Idea. What he has in mind is basically Plato's point that most things around us are not perfect instances of their type. Deterioration happens even when something is well made; many things are flawed. But when we have an aesthetic experience, we see beyond any flaws of this particular instance and recognize the universal.

Music as the Highest Art

The closest we can get to a pure understanding of fundamental reality through art is not, however, through the visual arts, which Schopenhauer assumes are representational. A painting of a tree, for instance, provides us with insight into the Platonic Idea of a tree, just as the tree itself does when we contemplate it aesthetically. But because the visual arts in this way always refer to a particular kind of thing, they do not quite give us direct insight into the will itself. Only music does that, according to Schopenhauer.

The explanation for this has much to do with his general view that the arts on the whole deal with representations of things, whereas music does not seem to be representing anything. One might object by pointing to architecture, which also does not seem to represent anything in particular. But according to Schopenhauer, architecture does draw our attention to certain fundamental grades of the will's objectification — in this case, fundamental physical principles. He

would claim, for instance, that the rigidity of buildings is being imposed in direct opposition to gravity. So there is still a kind of direct reference to certain basic forms in which the will is manifest, namely these fundamental principles of physics.

In music, however, we get something like the direct movements of the will itself. What Schopenhauer thinks happens is that when we listen to music, we sense the kind of movements of will and desire without any particular example being given, as would be the case if music were representing something. He claims that we have a very powerful emotional reaction to music because it so directly copies something like our basic emotional life. We hear music and feel ourselves drawn, in a sense, to follow it with our will. Music, according to Schopenhauer, is basically a direct manifestation of the will. At one point he goes so far as to say that music is essentially the equivalent of the world — that music presents an adequate embodiment of the will, just as the world taken as a whole does. He develops a whole series of ingenious analogies between the great chain of being in the world and the various parts of music, though I think the music of his own time is clearly the prototype for the images he has in mind.

The Saints and the Silencing of the Will

Even though music is the most powerful of the aesthetic forms, even music offers only temporary peace. No matter what degree of aesthetic insight one has, one can only contemplate art for so long before facing actual physical needs. Only the great saints of the world's various traditions escape willing entirely. So while aesthetic experience does draw our attention away from our everyday needs and projects, it is only a temporary escape.

By contrast, the great saints do succeed, according to Schopenhauer, in leaving behind the ordinary willfulness that is their natural condition. Schopenhauer offers an account of what the great saints accomplish, suggesting that the will itself in its full metaphysical form is actually in torment with itself. The reason all the manifestations of will end up in conflict with one another is because something fundamental to the will — the thing-in-itself in Kant's sense, the fundamental reality that accounts for everything we observe — is internally conflicted. In a sense, what the will wants is its own release or satisfaction. And it is the great saints who actually accomplish this.

What they do is allow their willfulness — the passion within them — to cease, through the exercise of their intellect. The will runs out of fuel, in effect, because it sees through the real folly of continuing to will while expecting any kind of peace to result. The saints utilize their intellect to silence the will. And attaining this silence, according to Schopenhauer, is the fundamental goal of the will itself. In a sense, then, what we have is the will manifesting itself through all of nature — through all the various creatures on the food chain, through the basic forces of nature — and ultimately through us. But the human will, which has a connection to intellect, is the only form of manifestation capable of escaping the real crisis, the pain of willfulness. The great saint is, in a sense, fundamentally what nature is designed to produce: the human intellect capable of recognizing the truth about reality — that all is one, that no part of everyday reality can gain at any other part's expense, and that it is therefore pointless to struggle.

Conclusion: The Nothingness Beyond Willing

Schopenhauer concludes his book, in all of its editions, with a statement about the condition that the great saints achieve. He

points out that although the recommendation to renounce the will does not sound very desirable to most people in most circumstances, all the saints who have offered testimony through the ages have claimed that their choice is truly blissful. His explanation closes the book with a characteristic mixture of austerity and defiance:

We have to banish the dark impression of that nothingness which, as the final goal, hovers behind all virtue and holiness, and which we fear as children fear darkness. On the contrary, we freely acknowledge that what remains after the complete abolition of the will is, for all who are still full of will, assuredly nothing. But also conversely, to those in whom the will has turned and denied itself, this very world of ours, with all its suns and galaxies, is nothing.

Lecture 59: Nietzsche — Perspectivism and the Will to Power

Professor Robert Solomon

Life and Character

Friedrich Nietzsche was a German philosopher, though to be perfectly honest, he considered himself a good European, and most of his mature life was spent outside of Germany — primarily in Switzerland and northern Italy.

He was born in 1844 in a small German town, into a family that went back several generations of Protestant preachers. He spent most of his life in particularly poor health, and in 1889 he collapsed into a state of insanity and spent the last tragic ten years of his life virtually in a vegetative state. He died in 1900 — rather prophetically, as it happens, because he had had much to say about what he expected of the new century.

He was trained as a classical philologist, something he showed great talent for while in school, and at an astoundingly young age — in his early twenties — he became a professor at the University of Basel in Switzerland. He spent about ten years teaching but resigned because of poor health, and spent the rest of his life, his sane life anyway, wandering among some of the more exotic resort places in Europe.

He was influenced first, as a student, by the philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer, and from Schopenhauer he got a vivid glimpse of the kinds of things that philosophy could do. Nevertheless, as we will see, one of the things he firmly rejected was Schopenhauer's pessimism. The single most profound personal encounter of his life was with the composer Richard Wagner. From Wagner, he came to see himself as not so much a philosopher as a budding musician.

And I think we can all be thankful — having heard his compositions — that he finally decided philosophy was his real skill. But the friendship with Wagner, and then the break with Wagner, he described as among the most traumatic periods of his life. One can understand a good deal of his philosophy, in fact, in terms of his musical sensibilities.

Distinctive Features of His Philosophy

The philosophy itself has some distinctive characteristics. It is thoroughly empirical, though perhaps not empirical in the sense that philosophers who use that label would often endorse. It was thoroughly experimental — and in fact I would say Nietzsche is probably the most experimental of all philosophers. He experiments with ideas, he experiments with worldviews, and he experiments most famously with his remarkable philosophical style.

He was skeptical, but again, not skeptical in the way that other philosophers — David Hume, for example — would be called skeptics. Rather, he instituted what is today called the hermeneutics of suspicion: the habit of looking at everything, and particularly those things that are most highly praised, with a kind of jaded eye. He was notoriously individualistic, but as we will see, his individualism also has to be carefully understood. He was not an individualist in the sense of the later existentialists, who would say that people have absolute freedom in what they choose to do. He was far more attentive to the circumscribed nature of our limitations than that.

He is most famous, perhaps, for saying "God is dead" — a phrase that he in fact borrowed from Hegel and, before that, from Luther. That claim, as we will see, permeates a good deal of his philosophy.

In this lecture, however, I would like to spend most of my time on two theses that are fairly well known but that I think are sometimes exaggerated in their impact on his overall thought. The first, which I take much more seriously, is the thesis of perspectivism. The second is the notion of the will to power — a rather notorious notion that, especially in the German context and the subsequent history of Germany, carries many overtones that I want to be very careful to diffuse.

Perspectivism

Perspectivism is, first of all, a critique. It is a critique of traditional metaphysics and epistemology, a critique of the idea that there is a true world, or that there is an objective way in which we can come to understand that world. Traditional philosophy is often organized around the distinction between appearances and reality, and one might even say that the mission of modern philosophy is to penetrate appearances and reach reality itself. This is something Nietzsche firmly rejects. As he famously says, once we get rid of the idea of a true world behind the appearances, what will disappear along with it is the idea of the world as mere appearances.

The word "metaphysics," of course, derives from Aristotle, and the enterprise it names was defended throughout most of the history of philosophy. Kant questioned it, but nevertheless held on to the distinction — which he described as the distinction between the phenomenal world and the noumenal world, the world of experience as opposed to the world as it is in itself. And this is precisely the kind of distinction that Nietzsche wants to say is utterly illegitimate and leads us into all sorts of philosophical problems.

Instead, Nietzsche famously says: there are no facts, only interpretations. There is no truth, there are only the errors of

mankind. Or, stated more modestly: there is no single truth, no God's-eye view, no privileged perspective. In his own day, for instance, science was already becoming sufficiently dominant that it claimed — at least in some circles — to offer the sole truth about things. In his early years, Nietzsche greatly praised science, because he saw that science did in fact embrace the experimental method. Science was a worldview that believed in questioning things, that maintained a certain healthy skepticism, that required evidence and experimentation.

Later, however, Nietzsche came to see that science too had become dogmatic and had effectively claimed the monopoly on truth. Against this, Nietzsche offers us a set of contrasts. It is one thing to see the world through science and scientific eyes. It is something else to see the world through aesthetic eyes. And generally, I would say Nietzsche preferred the aesthetic, even though he never disowned science and often drew upon it.

A quick example comes to mind. I was sitting at a café with a friend of mine, a poet, and we were looking at a flower on the table, which was — as my poet friend put it — "stretching its arms toward the heavens and the sunlight." Being an old biology student, I thought about turgor pressure and all the rest. And I realized instantly that his was, in fact, the better explanation. What Nietzsche wants to say is that there are many perspectives. Science and aesthetics are two of them. A moral perspective would be another; perhaps a religious perspective, another. And none of these is necessarily superior to the others.

One might read this as a kind of deconstructive campaign, much as has been defended in the twentieth century by certain well-known French philosophers. I think this is a mistake. It is true that Nietzsche has a great deal to say in a negative register — that much of what he says is critique. The attack on truth, as traditionally understood, is a

clear example. But it does not follow from this, as what I have already said would suggest, that Nietzsche rejects truth as such. One might say, as a contemporary philosopher has put it, that maybe there is no Truth with a capital T, but there are still lots of truths. For Nietzsche, I think we should understand this as part of a much more general campaign — and in particular, his naturalism, his appreciation of the world, his appreciation of human beings and human nature, and his fascination with how people actually behave and why.

All of this is obscured by ideas about another world: whether it is Kant's thing-in-itself, Plato's rather ethereal world of pure being, or the Christian heaven with God and all the rest. His thesis of the death of God fits into this broader agenda as well. It does not simply mean that there is no God and therefore no basis for religion. Much more profoundly, the death of God refers to the elimination of the idea of there being a single perspective, an objective perspective — the idea of Truth as such. But again, it is not simply a matter of rejecting all of this so much as replacing it with something better and healthier.

Perspectivism and Darwin

One might characterize Nietzsche as a pragmatic Darwinist with regard to epistemology. Darwin preceded Nietzsche by a few decades, and his works were very well known. Nietzsche expresses rather mixed attitudes toward Darwin — some of which, I think, stem from misunderstanding. But one thing I take to be beyond dispute is that Darwin's general view — namely the idea that humanity is continuous with the animal kingdom, and that we must explain in purely naturalistic terms how species came about and in particular how human beings came about — all of this is very close to Nietzsche's heart.

With regard to knowledge and perspectivism, I think this can be put in a very dramatic way. When Nietzsche says "there is no truth, there are only the errors of mankind," or when he says — referring back to Kant — that there is no synthetic a priori truth, only those schemes we cannot throw off, what he is referring to is something that can be very nicely framed in Darwinian terms.

Imagine two kinds of creatures: some of whom believe, as we do, that the future will be like the past, that the laws of nature are more or less constant, that if lightning strikes in one place it is quite likely to strike in such a place again — as opposed to another set of creatures who do not believe the future will be like the past, and who believe, on the contrary, that if lightning strikes in one place it is very unlikely to strike there again. It is not hard to see which of those two sets of creatures is going to survive. And so the belief that the future will be like the past is eventually going to be built into, if not our genes, certainly our education, in such a way that it becomes a kind of necessity for us.

So Nietzsche has a kind of answer for both David Hume and Immanuel Kant: the first of whom thought we had to be deeply skeptical about such principles, and the second of whom thought they were built into the very structure of the human mind. Nietzsche would say neither of these is right. Rather, these are things we believe because they have been practical — because they have proven to be beneficial for the species. And of course, the same sort of thing might be said of individuals. Philosophies are not abstract ideas defended by philosophers on the basis of some ethereal intuition. Philosophy, Nietzsche says, is almost always the confession and unconscious memoir of the philosopher. The ideas defended are the ideas that make the philosopher — to put it very crudely — feel good about himself.

One might compare Nietzsche here to American pragmatism as well — the notion that what is true is what works. This is not exactly right as far as Nietzsche is concerned, because what is true might also be what is beautiful. But the general project of getting rid of traditional metaphysics and traditional epistemology, and getting rid of the kind of skepticism that leaves us with nothing, is very much in tune with both Nietzsche and the pragmatists.

The Will to Power

With regard to the will to power, there is a whole host of misunderstandings surrounding it. In the first place, of course, "power" is a word that, in the history of Germany, makes people's blood curdle. It was certainly very prone to abuse. During Nietzsche's own lifetime, Bismarck was unifying Germany, and it would be a great mistake to think that the kind of power celebrated and manifested by Bismarck is the kind of power celebrated by Nietzsche — quite to the contrary. Nietzsche makes great fun of Bismarck; he obviously despised him and considered his to be a vulgar sense of power. The German word Nietzsche uses for power, in fact, refers to something that I think is better rendered as personal strength rather than anything like political power or power over other people.

The phrase "will to power" is a striking one, both in English and in German, and Nietzsche was clearly quite enamored of it — he uses it throughout his philosophy. But the first thing to say is that the notion is clearly borrowed from Schopenhauer. Schopenhauer was one of Nietzsche's early mentors, but Nietzsche came to reject him — and, as he put it in one of his later, rather biting aphorisms, everything that Schopenhauer ever said. For Schopenhauer, the will was reality, the very core of the world. But that runs directly against Nietzsche's perspectivism, in which there is no God's-eye view, no

objective reality. The will, in Schopenhauer's sense, would be precisely a thing-in-itself — and Nietzsche rejects the thing-in-itself. So he has deep suspicions about the very idea of the will.

Right away, then, we should be suspicious both about the "will" and about "power" in this phrase. The proper way to approach it, I would say, is first of all to understand it in terms of personal strength rather than anything political or having to do with one's position relative to other people. It should also be noted that while for Schopenhauer the will is necessarily singular — a single metaphysical entity underlying all of reality — this does not make sense for Nietzsche. As he talks about the will to power in its various manifestations, it is quite clear that it is not one thing but many.

There are two ways of thinking about the will to power in Nietzsche. First — and I will spend most of my time here because I think it is far more defensible — there is the will to power as a species of motivation. Second, there is the will to power as a metaphysical entity. But the will to power as a metaphysical entity runs against everything else Nietzsche says about perspectivism and the rejection of objectivity. While he does occasionally speak this way in his unpublished notes — and I am very hesitant to take those unpublished notes too seriously — it is reasonably clear from his published works that the will to power refers to the former: a theory of motivation.

Will to Power as a Theory of Motivation

To see how this works, we should contrast the will to power against its most likely opponent — the idea of hedonism, which has appeared throughout the history of philosophy, namely the idea that we, and indeed most creatures, act in pursuit of pleasure or at least to avoid pain. This has often struck people as not only plausible but

so obvious as to require little defense. You find it back in the ancient Greeks. Aristotle took great pains to refute it in favor of his own ethical theory. You find it in particular in British philosophy and especially in utilitarianism — defended by Jeremy Bentham, the founder of that movement, and by John Stuart Mill, its most famous advocate — as the underlying principle governing human behavior and the foundational concern of ethics.

What Nietzsche thinks — and here he joins a great many German philosophers — is that hedonism, this philosophy of seeking pleasure and avoiding pain, is simply vulgar. It is not what people actually act upon. It is at best an anomaly, or something secondary. In one of his sharpest aphorisms, Nietzsche says, with particular reference to John Stuart Mill: "Man does not seek pleasure. Only the Englishman does."

For Nietzsche, what we seek is power. But again, we must be very careful about what this means. What we are seeking might be better described as something like status — though that is still too social a concept. Perhaps the slightly over-Californian phrase "self-esteem" captures it best. If you look at how people actually behave, they rarely act out of a calculation of pleasure, and they rarely act straightforwardly in their own advantage construed in terms of pleasure and pain. Most people do what they do in order to achieve some kind of standing, to feel good about themselves.

This is true of Christian martyrs. It is true of students taking courses they do not particularly enjoy. It is true of people who work at jobs they do not like. It is true of people who marry because they believe they ought to. It is true of people who act heroically because they do not want to embarrass themselves in front of their fellow soldiers or colleagues. The truth is that people behave primarily for the sake of what we can call — somewhat misleadingly — power. Nietzsche surveys the history of human behavior and concludes that most of

what people do is far better explained by this power hypothesis than by the hedonistic one.

The will to power, so construed, tells us something about why we do what we do. We do not simply act in pursuit of available pleasures, and we are not especially averse to pain. Consider the kind of general mental, emotional, and sometimes physical suffering that we routinely put ourselves through for the sake of thinking better of ourselves, for the sake of raising ourselves in the estimation of our fellow human beings, for the sake of being virtuous.

Will to Power and Morality

This leads to a general moral theory for which Nietzsche is very famous, and we will take that up more fully in the next lecture. But the will to power also describes the very different ways in which people behave — and in particular the very different ways in which people approach morality. Morality, like all human behavior, is fundamentally an expression of the will to power. But it can take many different forms.

Here, too, Nietzsche operates as a perspectivist. There is the perspective of the strong, the perspective of those who are healthy and talented. For them, the expression of the will to power is to manifest and to exercise their talents and abilities to the greatest possible extent. On the other hand, there are people who do not have much power — and Nietzsche would say that most people are rather impoverished in this respect. It is not that they lack a will to power, but their exercise of it is going to be reactive, distorted. He talks about the reactive resentment of the least powerful in society.

Morality, as we know it, is precisely this kind of expression of the will to power — namely, the will to power of those who do not have much of it. The entire Judeo-Christian tradition is like this, and so

too, Nietzsche would say, is the philosophy of Socrates and Plato. In the Judeo-Christian tradition in particular, what one finds is essentially a morality of the weak, buttressed by an elaborate and sometimes alarming theological picture. At its root, the will to power within the Judeo-Christian moral tradition is defensive.

This is where Nietzsche introduces his notion of master and slave morality — the subject of the next lecture — and the idea that genealogically, looking back to its origins, what we call morality must be understood in terms of precisely this impoverished expression of the will to power.

Nietzsche and the Nazis

All this talk about power — combined with perspectivism, which can easily be mistaken for relativism or even, contrary to Nietzsche's own intentions, a kind of nihilism — and add to that the will to power understood in political terms, and it is not surprising that Nietzsche was often accused of being a Nazi, or rather a proto-Nazi, since the Nazi Party was not formed until nearly thirty years after his death. But the truth is that Nietzsche was absolutely no Nazi, even though he defended certain themes that the Nazis gladly embraced — such as the idea of self-assertion and his admittedly aggressive philosophical style. The idea of eugenics, of breeding people for their better traits, is another example. But what the Nazis took from Nietzsche was utterly distorted and perverted. And let me state, for the record, with no qualifications whatsoever: Nietzsche was no Nazi. He despised everything they stood for.

The truth of what happened is this. Nietzsche had a sister with whom he was actually quite close for most of their early lives. But she married a man named Förster, who was what we would call a proto-Nazi and who was definitively an anti-Semite, and he converted or

persuaded Nietzsche's sister into similar views. When Nietzsche collapsed into insanity in 1889 and was no longer capable of managing himself or his affairs, his sister and his mother took over his literary estate. When the mother died, the sister effectively ran away with Nietzsche's legacy.

She did what Nietzsche himself had never managed to do and actively promoted his works — but she promoted them with a particular slant. She even took his unpublished notes — and my own view is that there is always a reason why notes remain unpublished — and published them as if they were finished works by Nietzsche. There is even some suggestion that she forged some of them entirely. What all this did was lend Nietzsche's own work a kind of Nazi coloring. In the early 1930s, just after Hitler came to power, there is a well-known photograph, arranged by Nietzsche's sister, of Hitler gazing at a bust of Nietzsche. But it was Nietzsche's bust — not Nietzsche. Nietzsche himself would probably have spat in the dictator's face.

It is very important, given the history of Nietzsche scholarship, and of Nazi Nietzsche scholarship in particular, to emphasize that Nietzsche was himself very much an anti-anti-Semite. In fact, one of his last raving comments was that he thought all anti-Semites should be shot. By the accounts of people who knew him, Nietzsche was actually a rather benign character — thoroughly courteous, kind, and quiet — not at all the raving lunatic one might expect from his texts, which are filled with exclamation points and wild insults.

The truth is that Nietzsche was an exemplar of a very different kind of view. In the next lecture, we will attempt to make clear exactly what that view amounts to.

Lecture 60: Nietzsche — The Death of God, Morality, and Self-Creation

Professor Kathleen Higgins

"God Is Dead"

If people know anything about Nietzsche, it is often that he said "God is dead." What is less obvious is exactly what he meant by this.

In fact, the expression was not original to Nietzsche. Hegel had used it to describe a situation in which consciousness is profoundly unhappy, sensing that there is no real hope. And Hegel himself was quoting from a Lutheran hymn in which Good Friday — the experience of feeling a loss of hope in the wake of the death of Christ — is powerfully emphasized. So the sense of God being dead in that context is the image of the dead Christ and the state of the disciples in the aftermath.

What Nietzsche means by the expression, I think, summarizes and draws on both of these images. In a way, it can be described as an emblem — something that condenses a great many of his viewpoints. In the background, in addition to these earlier references, is the thinking of Ludwig Feuerbach, a theologian who had influenced Nietzsche quite considerably when Nietzsche was a student and still considering a career in theology. Feuerbach's view of God was that monotheism had been a project involving the projection of human qualities onto a divine ruler or power. According to Feuerbach, the postulation of gods by peoples generally involved their taking their own traits and imagining them in some being outside themselves. But he saw monotheism as particularly pernicious, because it involved the projection of all human capacity into a single divine being — with the result, Feuerbach thought, that

people no longer recognized their own powers and capacities as their own.

Nietzsche draws on Feuerbach in attempting to understand the death of God not as a condition that is entirely unhappy for humanity, but as something with genuine positive potential. There are a number of themes that Nietzsche associates with this new condition. He does think that Feuerbach's analysis is essentially correct, and also that Hegel's description of consciousness very much describes the consciousness of modernity — that for the modern world, we now live in a secular condition, that the kind of place for humanity found in earlier times is no longer available to contemporary society. In that sense, God is dead. But this can illuminate certain things about our real circumstances, Nietzsche thinks, that may be genuinely positive, and that might indeed produce a kind of revolution in thought with truly positive spiritual outcomes.

Perspectivism and the Critique of Morality

One of Nietzsche's central philosophical themes is perspectivism — the view that whatever one is observing is in some way contingent on one's particular perspective. What is denied here, at least from the standpoint of traditional theology, is that there is any viewpoint that could serve as what God's viewpoint was supposed to be: namely, the God's-eye view of things. God, according to traditional monotheism, surveys everything — indeed, not only everything simultaneously, but the whole of time as well. Nietzsche denies that this makes any sense. From his point of view, any kind of seeing is always seeing from a point of view.

This is closely related to his idea that morality itself is perspectival. He attacks traditional morality on a number of grounds, which we

will be discussing, but one of them is the idea that there is a single correct way of looking at human behavior and of determining what ought to be done. His view is instead that any judgment about what ought to be done depends very much on the position of the person making the assertion. And indeed, he often thinks that people have argued that something ought to be done precisely for very selfish, power-seeking reasons. So his denial that there is any single true morality is, from his point of view, a kind of liberatory statement — because it suggests that those who have attempted to gain power over other people should not be permitted to do so through this particular means.

A third thing suggested by the emblem "God is dead" is that there is no divine plan or design. While this might seem a rather discouraging proposition, Nietzsche suggests that what it enables humanity to do is to recognize its own role in creating value and meaning in life. Indeed, much of his philosophical work is concerned with precisely how one might go about doing that.

It is fair to point out that despite Nietzsche's obvious atheism — implied by the claim that God is dead — he retains a great deal of interest in spirituality. In fact, following Feuerbach, his complaint about traditional monotheism is that it has been spiritually impoverishing, because it has involved too much linking of oneself to a notion of God and attempting to gain power through this — he thinks imaginary — powerful being, rather than recognizing the real prospects of forging meaning in human life. So he attempts to direct a more terrestrial gaze at the prospect of finding meaning. And I think a great deal of what concerns him, the aesthetic dimension in particular, reflects genuine spiritual concerns.

Master and Slave Morality

His complaints against morality are made across a number of works, but one of the most famous discussions concerns what he calls master and slave morality. This has a direct relationship to perspectivism, because what Nietzsche is claiming is that there is not a single morality — that the kind of mores one internalizes has a great deal to do with where one finds oneself in society. He certainly thinks that one's position with respect to power has much to do with what kind of value system will be persuasive as a guide for living.

He tells a story that is essentially a fictionalized one, but one designed to make a certain point about the historical conditions of those who run society — the masters — and those whom they enslave or control — the slaves. He asks us to consider what kind of psychology one develops when one runs things. Generally speaking, the masters do not question their way of doing things. They simply act. They have no reason to justify their mode of existence to anyone, precisely because no one interferes with them. And so what the masters basically do is develop a way of life that displays their own self-confidence, their own strength, with very little about them that is particularly inhibited.

Nietzsche does not describe this as an absolutely ideal circumstance — certainly not from the viewpoint of other people — nor does he think it necessarily encourages intellectual development, since simply doing things does not require or involve a great deal of reflection. Nevertheless, he sees something positively healthy in the idea of simply acting, expressing oneself as one is inclined, without feeling that one needs to justify every step.

A very different psychology characterizes the slaves, however. Nietzsche probably has in mind here the kind of people who were enslaved by the Athenians or other Greeks in various wars. There was

nothing necessarily inherited about the position of slave — one might become a slave through capture. But Nietzsche thinks that if you consider the state of mind of someone who is captured in this way and attempts to cope with their situation, this is really a profound psychological problem. There is no real option to simply express oneself. If you are in captivity, you obviously must concern yourself with what those who control you are going to think. So the slave's position is always one that is not primarily active in Nietzsche's sense, but instead reactive. The slave must always mentally consider the viewpoint of the master before deciding to do anything at all.

The slave is therefore in a weak position. The slave cannot simply behave as he or she wishes, but must instead defer — and often defer real needs and desires — because of what the master might say or do in response. And that position is absolutely ideal ground for the development of resentment.

Nietzsche's view is that the morality most of us have inherited through the Western tradition — both from the Judeo-Christian religious background and from the background of Greek philosophy — is, in general, a kind of slavish attitude toward behavior. The Christian God, the monotheistic God who controls all and judges all, is in a sense in the position of the master in Nietzsche's original story. God judges everything; therefore, anything we consider doing ought at least to be weighed in terms of God's reaction. And Nietzsche finds this habit of always considering first what the reaction will be, and only secondarily what one wants to do or how one wants to approach things, to be psychologically debilitating.

If you are constantly reconsidering your actions entirely on the basis of whether you are going to be struck down by God, or imprisoned by a master, what ends up happening is that you never develop a real sense of yourself. You never develop genuine finesse in your

behavior. Instead, you are always slightly off balance — you never know when you will have to change course. He thinks that the kind of conscience most of his contemporaries have inherited is very much the kind of conscience that has to do with being perpetually off balance.

Becoming Who You Are

By contrast, he calls for another notion drawn from ancient Greece — the idea expressed by the poet Pindar: become who you are. This is a statement Nietzsche reiterates in a number of different contexts, and in a sense it might sound almost tautological. How can you become anything other than what you are?

The Pindarian context from which Nietzsche draws the line is one in which Pindar is urging the tyrant of Syracuse — his addressee — to ignore the people telling him what he ought to do, mostly for sycophantic motives. The tyrant has around him a whole group of yes-men who are encouraging him in certain behaviors that Pindar presumably finds questionable. Pindar instead appeals to his subject's real character and urges the tyrant to disregard all these voices. Instead, be who you are — suggesting that there are deep resources within him that are simply atrophying because he is paying too much attention to essentially a group of flatterers.

What Nietzsche does with this motto follows very closely the original Pindarian context: he is telling people, ignore the clamor around you. Even though everyone conforms to a particular way of speaking and acting, ignore it and look inward. See what traits you really have. His conviction is that, for the most part, modern people have become too thoroughly conformist — conforming to a morality they have inherited that causes them, again, to look outside themselves for

reinforcement or punishment, and that has involved a kind of neglect of their own actual traits and talents.

This kind of morality, which Nietzsche denigrates, is what he calls herd morality — a locution that carries a comic lampoon of the Christian notion of belonging to the flock. Nietzsche suggests that most people are indeed members of a flock or herd, and basically follow wherever they are led. But what this involves is really an inability — or an abandonment of the ability — to develop one's real potential.

Giving Style to One's Character

By contrast, Nietzsche encourages a modern morality that follows master morality in at least this one respect: action in the world growing out of one's own traits, one's own inner life, rather than being a matter of kowtowing to the way things are done.

This kind of existence requires, Nietzsche thinks, real insight into what one actually is. In order to become who you are, you must have some sense of what that is. What he means by this is not that one ought to consciously scrutinize one's character traits at every moment — in fact, Nietzsche thinks we often do best when we are most unselfconscious. But what it does involve is recognizing when one's actual character traits do not fit the cookie-cutter of traditional morality.

One of the things that discourages him most about the way moral education proceeds is that a single type of way of living is held up as the ideal. And anyone's actual individual traits — say, someone has a greater temper, or a more than usually kindly disposition — are valued only insofar as they conform to a more or less bland general description of what a good person is.

Nietzsche thinks we ought to turn instead to models that artists sometimes offer us: a sense of taking one's own talents and discovering what can be done with them. In his book *The Gay Science*, he makes the famous statement that one ought to give style to one's character — "a great and rare art," he calls it. In other words, he thinks that the enterprise of working out how to live, in an ethical sense, ought really to be aesthetic. One ought to gain some sense of what one's raw material is — what traits one is born with and what one is capable of doing with them — and try to make of oneself a kind of artwork.

What this suggests is that there are many different ways this might be done, and that people will be working with different basic material. Some people will perhaps have a better disposition for leadership. Others might have a great capacity to direct a particular talent in a certain direction. And the distribution of talents will correspond more closely to what people actually are and what they bring to the world.

From Nietzsche's point of view, everyone would be better off if individuals on the whole tried to make something artistic of themselves. He grants that this would involve developing habits that sometimes become second nature. He does not think people ought simply to give vent to whatever occurs to them. But nevertheless, the idea of genuinely discovering who one is by making oneself into a kind of artwork is something he thinks everyone can find satisfaction in. And indeed, he claims that what most often causes harm to other people in human behavior is usually motivated by resentment, by a lack of self-esteem — because, he says, people who are resentful will always take it out on you.

The Übermensch and the Last Man

In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche coins a famous term, the Übermensch — often translated as "Superman" and sometimes as "Overman." There is considerable debate about what he means by this concept. Certainly there have been suggestions that he meant a kind of master tyrant as the ideal; I think there is really very little justification for that interpretation, though it has sometimes been taken out of context to imply it.

What the context of Zarathustra's proposal suggests is that this artistic notion of self-creation — of spontaneous activity in accordance with a very disciplined, cultivated inner design that one has constructed within oneself — is really the idea of the Übermensch. The Übermensch is, in a sense, the ideal circumstance of genuinely behaving spontaneously, actively, and excellently, precisely because one has done all the groundwork that makes this possible, and has developed enough of a sense of oneself to act in such a way that something like beauty is realized.

The context in Zarathustra also makes very clear that the Übermensch is not at all what is currently regarded as an ideal. Zarathustra contrasts the Übermensch with what he calls the last man — something like the ultimate couch potato, one might say. Nietzsche's distaste for utilitarianism is certainly part of what lies behind this image. The last man, in Zarathustra's description, is someone who proclaims "we have invented happiness" — and then, Zarathustra says, he blinks. What is suggested here is that happiness is something that modern times have supposedly discovered: people have learned, scientifically, how to minimize pain and maximize pleasure. What Nietzsche insists is that if that is really one's highest aspiration, one has to do a great deal of blinking. One has to ignore a great deal of reality in order to arrange one's circumstances such that one's highest goal is a good night's sleep.

He does not deny that many people do take this to be the highest goal in life. But Nietzsche finds it rather pathetic. If the idea is to have a tranquil conscience or a tranquil night's sleep, and one sees the meaning of life as bound up with that, Nietzsche is suggesting: what has life got to do with it at all? In a sense, you are already fading out before your time if you find simple tranquility and the absence of perturbation to be the ideal.

By contrast, the Übermensch concept involves really throwing oneself into one's projects and enthusiasms — and these might actually be one's fatality. Zarathustra praises the person who has made their virtue their fatality: someone who has thrown themselves into their work or whatever endeavor they find valuable so completely that they might risk their lives in doing it. That, Nietzsche sees as truly heroic — a real way of living — as opposed to simply trying not to upset anyone, not to upset oneself, to get through the day in comfort and have some minor but unexacting recreation at night.

Nietzsche and Nihilism

I think it is important to recognize this positive dimension of Nietzsche's moral thought, because he is often described as a nihilist. In any ordinary sense of the word, I think this is simply a misunderstanding. He himself says quite a lot about nihilism, and I think part of what adds to the confusion is that he certainly does recognize that in the modern era, values are in a state of crisis. The traditional center of values — the Christian worldview — is, from his point of view, no longer genuinely alive in culture. It continues as an overlay: we celebrate Christmas, we organize our commercial life around it, we do all sorts of things that make it appear that

Christianity is the center of things. But from Nietzsche's point of view, this is not very deep at all.

So his concern is actually, I think, the opposite of what many people take it to be. He is not claiming that God is dead and that this makes life easy. He is very much concerned about what the aftermath of God's death means precisely because it does leave values open to question. Those who cannot find a new way of valuing are going to end up finding very little meaning in life, and will probably become difficulties for each other as well. So Nietzsche is not saying we can live without values and that that would be a good thing. What he is saying is that we must make those values ourselves.

Part of his message in saying that God is dead is thus to draw people's attention to this new historical situation in which we have the trappings of a religious worldview that are no longer truly alive in us — and we must begin asking again: what is going to center our lives?

One thing he opposes — and it is certainly not values as such — is being judgmental. He fears that in times of crisis, people tend to become more judgmental, to adhere to some fixed verdict or draw the line somewhere, simply to avoid being off balance or confused by the new situation. But he thinks it is very important to recognize that values are a creative activity of humanity. Evaluating, he thinks, is part of human nature. To fully absorb Feuerbach's point would be to recognize that we ourselves are the ones who make values — that they are not handed down to us from above, but that deciding what is important in life, recognizing what way of life is desirable for each individual: that is really the center of what it means to be a human being.

Eternal Recurrence

His famous theory of eternal recurrence makes sense in this light. Nietzsche's view is that whatever we value, it makes the most sense — as living human beings — to value life. And unfortunately, for many people, much of their assessment of their lives ends up being quite negative. They do not see life on this earth as good. In fact, the traditional near-mantra that this life is a vale of tears is itself, Nietzsche thinks, deeply negative — not tragic in a strong sense, but something that should really be set aside. If we are going to find some kind of meaning in life, what we ought to be doing is affirming life, finding life itself worthwhile.

Eternal recurrence is one of his ways of giving us some inkling of what that would involve. He presents the notion in *The Gay Science* in the form of a kind of parabolic thought experiment:

What if some day or night a demon were to steal after you into your loneliest loneliness and say to you: "This life as you now live it and have lived it, you will have to live once more and innumerable times more; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and every sigh and everything unutterably small or great in your life will have to return to you — all in the same succession and sequence — even this spider and this moonlight between the trees, and even this moment and I myself. The eternal hourglass of existence is turned upside down again and again, and you with it, speck of dust."

Would you not throw yourself down and gnash your teeth and curse the demon who spoke thus? Or have you once experienced a tremendous moment when you would have answered him: "You are a god, and never have I heard anything more divine!"

If this thought gained possession of you, it would change you as you are, or perhaps crush you. The question in each and every thing — "Do

you desire this once more and innumerable times more?" — would lie upon your actions as the greatest weight. Or how well disposed would you have to become to yourself and to life, to crave nothing more fervently than this ultimate confirmation and seal?

What Nietzsche is suggesting here is that we consider our lives on their own terms alone. He thinks there is a habit left over from the days when the Christian worldview had more immediate life for us — the habit of always assessing the contents of our lives in terms of something outside of life: perhaps the prospect of reaching heaven, or in secular terms, perhaps making more money, having a larger house — something beyond us, not part of our immediate present. While Nietzsche does not deny that goals structure our planning and indeed our making of ourselves as artworks, he does think this habit of always looking to something outside the real immediacy of life is a very dangerous and ultimately unfulfilling feature of most of our existence.

The fact that he chooses a demon in this context is, I think, particularly telling, since the famous demon of philosophy is of course Descartes' demon — presented as an almost evil alternative to God, one who deceives human beings about everything, so that we cannot trust anything we sense or perceive, but must instead assume it is really something radically different from what we take it to be. Descartes raises this as a question mark concerning how much we can trust our senses — and for Descartes, the ultimate answer is that God, who has designed us well, guarantees that no such deception is really occurring.

Nietzsche brings back a demon, and in this case the demon is again raising a question — not about perception, but about the contents of our lives. Do they make any sense? Are we really getting anything out of this? And what Nietzsche concludes is that there is no way to answer that question except from within oneself. You can answer it

by saying: what a horrible idea — I am glad to be finished with all these moments of the past and do not want to revisit them. Nietzsche sees this as a fairly meaningless way to live, but one that a great many people, in effect, act as though they endorse.

By contrast, he suggests that eternal recurrence — the idea that our lives could repeat themselves over and over again — invites us to think of ourselves as assembling a structure in the course of living, much like assembling an artwork. And even if he does not believe in an afterlife that will give this structure a permanence beyond one's own mind, to think of one's life as this assembly one is creating as an artwork is something he thinks will allow us to recognize the value that we ourselves are putting into life.

So the demon's question is one that each of us must answer for ourselves. The person who says "nothing would be more wonderful — I could crave nothing more perfect, this is divine" represents an extreme case: someone who finds nothing they would want to eliminate from their life. But Nietzsche thinks that so much of the average person's life is spent resisting and disliking what it is filled with, that people have in effect given up on the question of value altogether.

Eternal recurrence is thus raised as, again, the question of meaning: do we find meaning in our lives? And Nietzsche's response to the question of what to do after the death of God is: well, let us look for some.

Coda to Part V: The Age of Ideology

The nineteenth century was an age of extraordinary confidence. It was also an age of extraordinary uncertainty. The thinkers we have encountered throughout Part V inherited the intellectual revolution of the Enlightenment and the political revolution of the modern world, yet they found themselves confronting realities that the eighteenth century had only dimly anticipated. Industrialization transformed economies. Nationalism reshaped political loyalties. Scientific discoveries altered humanity's understanding of nature. Traditional religious authority weakened. New social classes emerged. Old institutions struggled to adapt. The result was a century in which ideas acquired unprecedented power.

That power is the defining theme of this part of the course.

The Age of Ideology was not merely an age in which people held strong beliefs. Human beings have always done that. Rather, it was an age in which comprehensive systems of thought sought to explain history, society, morality, politics, religion, and human destiny as parts of a single coherent vision. Philosophers no longer confined themselves to asking isolated questions about knowledge or ethics. Increasingly, they attempted to construct entire worldviews capable of interpreting the meaning of the modern condition.

The ambitions of these thinkers were immense.

German Idealism began by confronting the philosophical challenges left by the Enlightenment. Kant had transformed philosophy by demonstrating both the power and the limits of human reason. His successors sought to move beyond those limits. Fichte, Schelling, and above all Hegel developed systems of breathtaking scope, attempting to understand reality itself as an unfolding process of reason, spirit, and historical development. History ceased to be

merely a sequence of events. It became a meaningful process with an intelligible direction.

This idea would prove enormously influential.

For Hegel, history revealed the gradual realization of freedom. For Marx, it revealed the development of material forces and class conflict. For Comte, it demonstrated humanity's progression toward scientific maturity. Despite their profound disagreements, these thinkers shared a conviction that history possessed a structure that could be understood. Human beings were no longer simply participants in historical change. They could become interpreters of history itself.

At the same time, powerful reactions emerged against excessive rationalism. Romantic thinkers challenged the Enlightenment's confidence in calculation and abstraction. They emphasized imagination, emotion, individuality, creativity, culture, and historical particularity. Human beings, they argued, were not merely rational agents. They were creatures of passion, memory, identity, and longing.

The nineteenth century thus became a dialogue between reason and experience, system and individuality, science and culture.

No movement embodied the practical implications of ideological thinking more dramatically than Marxism. Marx transformed Hegel's historical vision into a theory of economic and social development. Capitalism appeared not as a permanent arrangement but as a stage in a larger historical process. Class conflict became the engine of history. Philosophy itself acquired a new task. The point was no longer merely to interpret the world but to change it.

This revolutionary impulse would shape the political history of the next century more profoundly than almost any other intellectual development.

Yet Part V is not solely a story about confidence in historical progress. It is equally a story about growing doubt.

As industrialization expanded and traditional religious frameworks weakened, many thinkers became increasingly uncertain about the foundations of meaning itself. Schopenhauer saw beneath civilization's optimism a world driven by blind striving and perpetual dissatisfaction. Kierkegaard insisted that objective systems could never resolve the deepest questions of personal existence. Both challenged the assumption that reason alone could provide human fulfillment.

These criticisms reached their most explosive expression in Nietzsche.

Few thinkers stand more clearly at the threshold between centuries. Nietzsche subjected Western civilization to one of the most penetrating critiques in intellectual history. He questioned inherited morality, challenged religious assumptions, attacked complacent notions of truth, and exposed the fragility of values that many had assumed were permanent. Most importantly, he recognized that modernity faced a crisis far deeper than political disagreement or social conflict.

The crisis was spiritual.

If traditional sources of meaning lose their authority, what remains? If inherited values can no longer command belief, how should human beings live? If God is dead, not as a theological proposition but as a cultural reality, who or what will provide moral direction?

These questions close Part V, but they do not receive definitive answers.

Instead, they open the door to the next phase of our journey.

Part VI explores the intellectual world that emerged after the collapse of nineteenth-century certainties. The confidence that characterized

many ideological systems begins to fracture. New approaches to philosophy arise, often skeptical of grand theories and comprehensive explanations. The focus shifts from history and society to language, consciousness, culture, psychology, and the structures underlying human experience.

Freud will explore the hidden forces operating beneath conscious thought. Phenomenologists will investigate the nature of experience itself. Analytic philosophers will subject language and logic to unprecedented scrutiny. Existentialists will confront freedom, anxiety, and authenticity in a world that offers no guaranteed meaning. New intellectual movements will emerge from the recognition that reality may be more complex, fragmented, and ambiguous than nineteenth-century systems had imagined.

In many respects, Part VI begins where Nietzsche leaves us. The great ideological frameworks remain powerful, but their authority is increasingly questioned. The search for certainty gives way to the analysis of consciousness. The quest for historical destiny gives way to the examination of lived experience. The dream of a single explanatory system gives way to a plurality of perspectives.

The Age of Ideology transformed the modern world by demonstrating the power of ideas. The age that follows will ask a more unsettling question: what happens when we begin to doubt the systems that once promised to explain everything?

That question will define the intellectual landscape of the twentieth century.

Part VI: Modernism and the Age of Analysis

Preamble

Somewhere between the Franco-Prussian War and the dropping of the atomic bomb, Western civilization lost its nerve about progress. Not about progress in the technical sense — the twentieth century would prove to be the most ferociously inventive in human history, generating antibiotics and automobiles and aircraft and eventually the means of its own annihilation all within a single lifetime. What it lost confidence in was something more foundational: the idea, bequeathed by the Enlightenment and elaborated through the nineteenth century, that reason, science, and historical development were all moving in the same direction, and that direction was good. The twelve lectures of Part VI inhabit the intellectual world that emerged from that loss of confidence, a world in which the central questions of philosophy shifted from what we can know about the universe to what we can say about our knowledge at all, and from how civilization ought to be organized to why it seems so bent on destroying itself.

The introductory lecture frames the period with unusual honesty about the forces that made it what it was. The concentration of economic power in vast bureaucratic corporations, the rise of mass media as both entertainment and propaganda instrument, the First World War's demonstration that the Enlightenment's most celebrated achievements — rationalized industry, modern chemistry, mechanized logistics — could be turned toward slaughter on an industrial scale, and then the Second World War's still darker confirmation of that lesson: all of these form the context in which twentieth-century philosophy did its thinking. What is remarkable,

the lecture suggests, is how seriously philosophers took that context, how much the professional discipline of philosophy — which had spent much of the previous century working its way through fairly abstruse questions about the categories of the mind — found itself suddenly facing questions that felt genuinely urgent. Three broad strategies of response are distinguished here, and the distinction is worth keeping in mind as the individual lectures unfold. Regulative philosophy, associated above all with logical positivism and structural linguistics, sought to defend reason against irrationalism by establishing rigorous criteria for what could count as meaningful or true. Therapeutic philosophy, associated with Freud, the Frankfurt School, pragmatism, and the later Wittgenstein, sought not to adjudicate what was rationally permissible but to diagnose and relieve the intellectual and social confusions that caused human suffering. Edifying philosophy, associated with phenomenology and existentialism, sought something harder to name — a recovery of the sense of wonder, the examination of what it means to exist as a particular being in a particular time, the quest for what Heidegger would call authentic selfhood.

William James receives the first full treatment, and rightly so, because pragmatism represents one of the most genuinely original contributions to philosophy that the New World has made to the tradition it inherited from the Old. The comparison the lecture draws between James and Nietzsche is illuminating: both were perspectivalists, both rejected the correspondence theory of truth, both saw philosophical doctrines as expressions of psychological need as much as exercises in pure reason. But where Nietzsche turned the loss of absolute truth into a drama of power and self-overcoming, James turned it into something characteristically American — a philosophical Protestant reformation in which every individual is empowered to decide, on the basis of what it does for them, what metaphysical beliefs they need to live a full life. The

famous test of cash value, the insistence that the meaning of a proposition is the difference it would make to experience, the treatment of truth as something that happens to an idea rather than something it possesses eternally: all of these represent a systematic attempt to bring philosophy down from its own transcendental clouds and back into the lives of actual people making actual choices. One need not agree with every consequence James draws to recognize that the attempt is philosophically serious and culturally significant.

The two lectures on Freud constitute one of the most compelling sequences in the entire course, partly because of the depth of engagement with Freud's actual arguments and partly because of the care with which they place those arguments within a larger philosophical context. The account of the tripartite self — id, ego, superego — is not presented merely as a clinical or psychological theory but as a philosophical anthropology, a sustained counter-argument to the rationalism of Plato, the optimism of Marx, and the social contractarianism that had dominated political philosophy since Hobbes. Freud's insistence that reason is the weakest party in the psychic economy, that human beings are not gentle creatures who want to be loved but creatures with a powerful allotment of aggressiveness that civilization can contain but never extinguish, gives Civilization and Its Discontents the weight of a philosophical tragedy. That weight is only increased by the biographical context the lecture provides: a man suffering from cancer, writing in Vienna in 1929, watching his patients, watching the news, watching the gathering political catastrophe, and concluding not that things will get better but that the best one can hope for is to bear what is unavoidable with as much dignity as the embattled ego can muster.

A.J. Ayer's logical positivism offers a sharp tonal contrast. Where Freud is dark, Ayer is brisk; where Freud circles endlessly around the

irrational, Ayer proposes simply to eliminate nonsense. His verification principle — the claim that a sentence is literally meaningful only if it is either analytically true or empirically testable — is presented here not as a piece of arbitrary philosophical legislation but as the culmination of a long empiricist tradition reaching back through Hume to Locke, now armed with the new resources of modern symbolic logic. The elimination of metaphysics, the emotivist account of ethical judgments, the dissolution of the problem of induction as a pseudo-problem: all of these follow with a certain remorseless clarity from the positivist starting point. The lecture is careful, however, to note what is lost in the exercise as well as what is gained, and the irony that the supposedly anti-metaphysical movement ends by making philosophy the handmaid of science — a role not so different, structurally, from its medieval service to theology — is not missed.

Max Weber represents a different kind of regulative ambition: not the elimination of metaphysics but the creation of a value-free science of society, a sociology rigorous enough to generate genuine understanding without becoming the instrument of any particular ideology. His three ideal types of authority — legal-bureaucratic, traditional, and charismatic — are presented here as taxonomic tools in the manner of the biological sciences, categories precise enough to be applied cross-culturally but flexible enough to account for the enormous variety of human political life. The analysis of bureaucracy in particular, with its emphasis on technical competence over personal loyalty, its tendency toward social leveling and its equally powerful tendency toward plutocratic self-perpetuation, has lost none of its relevance. And the concept of charismatic authority, with its disturbing description of the ways in which exceptional individuals can call communities into being around them through sheer force of devotion, reads in the context of the 1930s with an urgency that Weber, who died in 1920, could not entirely have anticipated.

Edmund Husserl's phenomenology opens the edifying strand of the course, and it is presented with appropriate attention to the tension at its core: the tension between Husserl's desire for an absolutely certain foundation for all knowledge, modeled on the necessities of mathematics, and the much more exploratory, descriptive project that phenomenology actually turned out to be. The notion of the phenomenological epoch — the bracketing of all questions about the external causes of experience in order to attend purely to experience as given — is difficult to grasp in the abstract but illuminates considerably when presented through the example of the bowl on the lectern, an object we never simply see in isolation but always as part of a network of spatial, tactile, and conceptual presuppositions that we bring to every perceptual act. Husserl's later concept of the Lebenswelt, the lived world of shared practices and presuppositions that underlies all more formal knowledge, anticipates much of what Heidegger and Wittgenstein would develop in very different directions, and signals a recognition, coming late in Husserl's career, that the mathematical model with which he began could not account for the full texture of human experience.

John Dewey's pragmatism receives its own lecture, and the lecture wisely emphasizes what makes Dewey distinctive rather than simply repeating the themes introduced through James. Where James was primarily a psychologist turned philosopher, Dewey was a Hegelian turned pragmatist, and the residue of Hegel in his thinking gives it a historical depth that James's more psychological version lacks. His critique of the spectatorial theory of knowledge — the idea, traceable through Descartes to Plato, that the mind is fundamentally a passive receiver of impressions from an inert external world — is not merely epistemological but sociological: he argues that this theory of knowledge is the intellectual product of an aristocratic culture that valued contemplation over labor, and that replacing it

with an instrumental theory oriented toward solving actual human problems is therefore both philosophically and politically progressive. His treatment of ethics as an experimental rather than a dogmatic enterprise, applying the same methods of inquiry that work in science to the moral problems of a changing social world, represents perhaps the most thoroughgoing attempt in modern philosophy to eliminate the gap between theory and practice that has haunted the tradition since Plato drew it.

Heidegger is the most difficult thinker in Part VI, and the lecture acknowledges this without flinching. The anti-Cartesian thrust of his project — the insistence that we do not start as isolated subjects trying to establish contact with an external world but as beings-in-the-world whose practical engagement with things precedes any theoretical stance — is presented clearly and with genuine philosophical force. The analysis of equipment, of the hammer that becomes visible as an object only when it misfunctions, provides an elegant illustration of why Heidegger thought the world-as-equipment was more primordially given than the world-as-collection-of-objects. The distinction between authentic and inauthentic existence, the concept of thrownness, the analysis of being-unto-death as the ultimate ground of authentic self-understanding: all of these are explained with care. The biographical detail about Heidegger's Nazism is not evaded, and the lecture rightly refuses the easy consolation of separating the great philosopher from the political collaborator, noting that the same philosophical move — reinserting oneself in one's traditions and heritage — that Heidegger offered as the path to authenticity was the same move that allowed him to accommodate himself to the crimes of the regime he had joined.

Wittgenstein's lecture on the Philosophical Investigations is one of the most technically demanding in the course and one of the most

rewarding. The critique of the picture theory of meaning, the demonstration through the builders' language game that words like here and two are not names and cannot be forced into the same mold as words like block and slab, the family resemblance account of concepts, and above all the private language argument — the demonstration that there can be no such thing as a genuinely private language because the very notion of following a rule requires the possibility of getting it wrong, which in turn requires an independent check that a purely private rule cannot provide — all of these are explained with the patience they require. The philosophical implication is enormous: the entire Cartesian tradition, which begins with the certainties of private experience and tries to work outward to the world, has been building on a fantasy. Philosophy begins, for the later Wittgenstein, not in the mind but in the forms of life from which our linguistic practices are inseparable.

The Frankfurt School lecture provides the explicitly political counterweight to the more individually oriented analyses that surround it. The School's history — Jewish radicals driven from Germany by the Nazis, ending up at Columbia and then in California, trying to understand how a civilization that had produced Kant and Beethoven had produced Auschwitz — gives its theoretical concerns an existential urgency absent from most academic philosophy. The analysis of the culture industry, the critique of the Enlightenment's own slide into its opposite, the concern for individual autonomy against the homogenizing forces of mass media and mass consumption: all of these themes feel less like abstract intellectual positions than like responses to something the School's members had actually witnessed and survived.

The final lecture on structuralism takes the course in a direction that the preceding lectures had not quite prepared for: the claim that neither Platonic forms nor Cartesian subjects nor Marxist economic

forces nor Freudian unconscious drives can adequately account for meaning, because meaning arises from something deeper and stranger than any of them — the differential relations among elements in a structure that precedes and determines them all. Saussure's linguistics, with its insistence that the sign is arbitrary and that the meaning of any given word is constituted entirely by its differences from other words in the system, and Lévi-Strauss's application of structural analysis to mythology, with its demonstration that the same mythemes can carry entirely different meanings depending on the structural system in which they appear, represent the furthest point the course reaches in the direction of pure formalism. The lecture's two closing ironies — that the structuralists, in eliminating all other centers, simply installed structure as a new center, and that their obsession with finding universal mathematical order everywhere betrays precisely the kind of metaphysical desire they claimed to have transcended — provide a fitting point of transition toward the deconstructive moves that would follow in the next generation and that lie just beyond the horizon of Part VI.

What unifies all twelve of these lectures, despite their enormous diversity of subject and method, is a shared reckoning with the same underlying experience: the recognition that the world does not come with its meanings already attached, that the frameworks through which we organize experience — whether linguistic, psychological, social, or metaphysical — are human constructions, historically contingent and subject to revision, and that this recognition is not the end of the philosophical enterprise but the condition under which it must now be carried on. Whether one responds to that recognition in the regulative spirit of Ayer, the therapeutic spirit of Freud and Dewey, or the edifying spirit of Husserl and Heidegger, the response must be made without the comfort of certainties that the nineteenth century had already begun to dissolve and the twentieth

had finished off entirely. The Age of Analysis is, at its core, an age that has learned to be honest about its own presuppositions, and that honesty, however uncomfortable, is one of the genuine intellectual achievements of the modern period.

Lecture 61: Introduction to Modernism and the Age of Analysis

Professor Darren Staloff

Overview

In this lecture, we endeavor to introduce the themes that were central to philosophy in the first half of the twentieth century — an age which has been aptly described as an age of extremes. For it was in this half-century that the Western industrialized world went through a series of rapid transformations in every aspect of life: transformations so complete, thorough, and swift that they resulted in a pervasive milieu of uncertainty and anxiety.

It was in this context that modern philosophers re-examined the function, the role, and the practice of their discipline. They sought to respond to this new uncertainty in a variety of ways, and we shall see that they came up with three different strategies of philosophizing: what we will call regulative philosophy, therapeutic philosophy, and edifying philosophy. But first, I think we should explore some of these transformations themselves, to get a sense of the context in which philosophers wrote. In particular, we are going to look at economic transformations, changes in mass communications, changes in political practice, and developments in the high culture of the arts and sciences.

Economic Transformations

Probably the most important transformations occurred in the economy. This was the era in which the industrial economy of capitalism really matured. By maturation we mean that it was

transformed from a nineteenth-century age of familial entrepreneurialism — in which most industrial, manufacturing, and commercial enterprises were often family-run or based on partnerships between a limited number of people — into the far more formal and corporate structures of organization that characterized the early twentieth century: structures which were far more centralized and wielded much greater economic power.

In particular, the early twentieth century saw the emergence of the new vertically integrated holding company. What characterized the vertically integrated holding company was that it controlled every element involved in its industrial processes, including inputs, transportation, financing, and marketing. The standard examples include U.S. Steel, which not only controlled the iron ore extracted to produce the steel, but also held significant interests in West Virginia coal mining, in the railroads that moved coal to the steel foundries, in the banks that financed it, and in the various sectors that marketed it. Other examples include Standard Oil in the United States and, abroad, Krupp and, of course, IG Farben in the chemical industry.

Such corporations not only wielded incredible power within the marketplace; they also controlled assets that in some cases rivaled the resources of contemporary national governments. It was also in this period that industrial technology gave rise, for the first time, to consumer goods that, though still somewhat expensive, could now be purchased by individual families through credit financing. Here we think specifically of modern household appliances like dishwashers, washing machines, and refrigerators, all of which streamlined household labor and made life considerably more comfortable. Similarly, the mass production of the automobile democratized transportation, based not only on the development of revolutionary production technologies but also on the spread of credit financing

and installment purchasing — also part of the maturation of industrial capitalism.

Modern corporations increasingly became bureaucratic institutions with steeply graded hierarchies of officers, long-term planning horizons, and their own internal research and development facilities. It is really in this period that science and technology became integral to corporate planning, and many scientists became members of corporate organizations. Such corporations also found that management was increasingly being separated from ownership: managers became professional executives, while owners were now largely a class of stockholders — some institutional, many private individual speculators.

As industrial power became centralized in a handful of large, increasingly multinational corporations, various major industrial sectors underwent cartelization — sometimes with the cooperation of their governments, sometimes against it. The goal of such cartelization was to overcome the unpredictability and inefficiency of market fluctuations by having cartels plan production, marketing, and distribution. I mention this because, despite the efforts of cartels, the business cycle continued to fluctuate quite wildly between extremes. The astounding economic and stock market boom of the 1920s, for example, was followed by a devastating bust — one that was not only American but global — known as the Great Depression.

Mass Media and Communications

This period also witnessed the rise of modern mass media and communications industries — developments that helped fuel the growth of mass consumerism and support the rise of mass production. Figures like William Randolph Hearst helped introduce a new era of cheap national newspapers, the so-called penny press,

which were centrally owned and produced for a newly created national market. For the first time, there would be a national news market rather than merely local and regional ones. The power of such mass print conglomerates, particularly in shaping public opinion, is well exemplified at the end of the nineteenth century by Hearst's role in fomenting the Spanish-American War through his jingoistic depiction of the sinking of the USS *Maine* in Havana harbor.

In addition to the concentration of newspaper power, new media of communication and entertainment also emerged: radio; motion pictures, which evolved from silent films to talkies to color; and finally, by the end of our period, television. Each of these media was organized in the same centralized, corporate, industrial forms.

It was the rise of mass media that helped create a venue for a new, scientifically grounded form of advertising, one based on an understanding of individual and group psychology as well as careful market research. The result was the creation of a popular culture of mass consumerism. This is significant because these same advertising techniques could be deployed in the political sector — and indeed they were, universally, in times of war, to propagate desired information and public attitudes. In subsequent decades they were used increasingly by authoritarian regimes. The Nazi state, in fact, had a Ministry of Propaganda headed by a figure who claimed to have learned all his techniques from Madison Avenue advertising firms.

Political Transformations

Concomitant to these changes were political transformations equally characteristic of the changing industrialized world. The nineteenth-century principles of laissez-faire gave way to a new activist conception of the state. In the nineteenth century, the state was

primarily a legislative sovereign. The twentieth-century state was, in fact, an administrative structure, increasingly dominated by a bureaucracy empowered to regulate and integrate the economy and to provide social welfare services — all functions which had no place in the nineteenth-century conception of the rule of law. Theorists of the Frankfurt School called this new structure "state monopoly capitalism," and its cause, in the United States at least, was championed by social democrats, progressives, and New Dealers, and by socialists in Europe.

Another important political development to address is the breakdown of the much-sought Concert of Europe, which was finally destroyed by the tragic outbreak of the First World War. The First World War was known at the time, and in its immediate aftermath, simply as the Great War — and the reason it was called the Great War was that it was one of the most terrible tragedies in human history. It was a devastating struggle that dragged on for four long years, and the eventual peace resolved none of the fundamental issues that had caused the war, despite the patriotic commitment rallied by state propaganda. The result was a growing disillusionment with the parliamentary democracies that had pursued this senseless struggle, which had resulted in mass death for no legitimate purpose.

This certainly helped contribute to the rise of authoritarian and totalitarian regimes in the aftermath of that war — regimes that emerged in the very heart of Europe. Spain and Italy became fascist. Russia was seized by Bolshevik revolutionaries. And Germany succumbed to the domination of Adolf Hitler's National Socialist Party. In the course of their respective tenures, Stalin and Hitler would perpetrate mass murder on a scale hitherto unimaginable.

Politically, the epoch ends with the Second World War — in some ways a resumption of the First — which itself culminated in the

detonation of nuclear weapons at Hiroshima and Nagasaki. It is that moment which in many ways revealed to the entire world the dark potential of modern scientific rationality: its capacity to produce not only labor-saving appliances but mass destruction on a previously unimaginable scale.

Cultural Transformations: Relativism and Irrationalism

Finally, the culture of the modern West was transformed in this period by the emergence of both relativism and irrationalism — forces that seemed to call the whole modern program of secular knowledge and progress into question. Indeed, science itself seemed to move in a relativist direction. Einstein, in his famous theories of relativity, had destroyed the core Newtonian convictions about absolute position and motion in space, and had even demolished the Euclidean conception of space itself in favor of a notion of curved space.

In the field of mathematics, Kurt Gödel's incompleteness proof showed that mathematics was not ultimately reducible to logic — that one needed to introduce separate and perhaps arbitrary axioms in order to generate elementary number theory in Peano arithmetic. And most famously, the development of quantum physics and Werner Heisenberg's uncertainty principle, along with his articulation of the Copenhagen interpretation of quantum physics, further undermined the mechanistic determinism of the Newtonian universe. The uncertainty principle claimed that one can never know where the fundamental entities of the universe are prior to observing them, because the very act of observation affects their location, position, and motion. Even more disturbing, the Copenhagen interpretation claimed that, in fact, these entities are not anywhere at all until observed. Heisenberg actually argued for a rejection of Newtonian

corpuscular realism and returned to an older Aristotelian metaphysic based on potentiality: the electron exists only potentially until it is observed, at which moment it becomes actualized.

In the humanities, and particularly in anthropology, an important development occurred in America around the figure of Franz Boas, who first formalized our current conception of culture as a shared world of meanings fundamentally relative to personal and social circumstances. This culture concept would come to dominate the writing of history and most of the humanities, and would have an immense influence over all the social sciences. It was popularized in following decades by figures like Margaret Mead, who introduced the culture concept — and with it its inherent relativity — to the general public.

In the arts, one senses a dark feeling of fear and foreboding that lingers over much of the literary production of this period. Robert Musil and Marcel Proust wrote masterworks of despair. James Joyce and Thomas Mann wrote works of spiritual redemption that cause us to turn away from the present towards an imaginary other world. And instead of the utopian projection and reformist realism that characterized literature in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, this period produced the three great dystopian novels: *We* by Yevgeny Zamyatin, which exposes the contradictions of Soviet life; *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley, which illuminates the dark potentials of a capitalist consumer society; and, of course, George Orwell's *1984*, which uncovers the dangers of centralized authority in a propagandizing state.

Perhaps it was W.B. Yeats who best summed up the mood of the time in his famous poem "The Second Coming": *The falcon cannot hear the falconer. / Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold.*

Three Strategies of Philosophizing

It was in this context of tumult and change that philosophers sought to reconceptualize the role and function of their discipline. The result was the development of three competing conceptions of philosophic practice: philosophy as regulative, philosophy as therapeutic, and philosophy as edifying. Now, I want to point out that this is one way of thinking about twentieth-century philosophy, and like all classificatory schemes, there are many cases of overlap — many figures deploy more than one approach. But let us begin with the regulative conception.

Regulative Philosophy

The regulative conception draws heavily on Platonic and Kantian antecedents. It holds that the philosopher should be a sort of high cultural critic who develops criteria for distinguishing between what passes muster as rational and what does not. Such a philosophy is epistemology-based, and in some sense it serves the role of a high cultural censor by imposing rules and criteria for warranted assertibility that will help us eliminate — or at least limit — the dangers of irrationalism and relativism.

A.J. Ayer, for example, exemplifies this approach in his positivist analysis of language. The goal of the rigorous analysis of linguistic meaning was always to allow the philosopher to identify and purge nonsense — and that is the word Ayer uses — from the philosophical and high cultural scene. Positivism resisted relativism by offering a tripartite classification of truth. It distinguished three different sorts: absolute certainty, which one would find only in logic and the logical studies exemplified by Ayer's own analytic philosophy; practical certainty, which was probabilistic and would be found in empirically based judgments, particularly in science; and mere opinion, which had almost no epistemic value whatsoever and encompassed everything else. One of the functions of this classificatory scheme

was to limit relativism to that last, residual realm — the realm of mere opinion.

Saussure shared many of Ayer's critiques of the metaphysical analysis of language and meaning. Critical to Saussurean structuralism was the recognition that the ultimate bearers of meaning — what he called deep structures — were in fact material, unconscious, and deterministic. This is to say that, like Ayer, Saussure shared a sort of methodological naturalism. Indeed, one is almost tempted to think of Saussurean structuralism as a French analogue of logical positivism. Saussure's preference for *langue* over *parole*, and for the synchronic over the diachronic — his greater interest, that is, in the underlying logical structure of language than in the actual practice of speech — seems to mirror and in many ways reflect the Positivist embrace of logical structure and necessity over merely historical particularity or contingency.

Max Weber also engaged in a regulative conception of philosophy insofar as he embraced the positivist distinction between is and ought — the so-called fact-value distinction — as evidenced by his call for a value-free sociology, one based on facts rather than values. For Weber, the de-ideologizing of social theory was a regulative effort to construct a scientific or positive theory of man and society. And quite clearly, the taxonomic ideal types invoked by Weber reflect the methodological techniques of the life sciences, and in particular those of evolutionary biology.

Therapeutic Philosophy

Let us turn to another way that philosophers thought about practicing their discipline: the therapeutic conception. Critical to this conception is an attempt to focus not only on theory for its own sake, but as a way of unifying theory with practice — and that is the very essence of therapy: to use theory to ameliorate situations. Rather than analyzing and judging, as regulative philosophers do,

therapeutic thinkers sought to understand so that they could then ameliorate the human condition. They did embrace modern science — they were not irrationalists — but not as a bulwark against cultural chaos or relativism. Rather, they embraced science as a means to fix identifiable problems and offer humanitarian relief.

This tradition was initiated by Sigmund Freud. His pessimistic and naturalistic analysis of the divided self — a self split between the libidinous id, the reality-oriented ego, and the morally demanding superego — was always intended not as pure knowledge for its own sake, but as a scientific means to reduce psychic trauma and pain: always designed, precisely, to give therapy. The form of this treatment is, in fact, a talking cure — that is what Freud called it — whose central strategy is to reduce the power of hidden conflicts and drives that dominate our minds by literally uncovering them, by talking about them and making us conscious of them. The notion is that once we are conscious of these hidden powers, they lose some of their grip on us. I mention this because the talking cure is a strategy shared by almost all therapeutic approaches, including, as we shall see, pragmatism, Wittgensteinian ordinary language analysis, and the critical theory of Frankfurt School Marxism.

Let us turn to the Frankfurt School first. While drawing heavily on Freud, its thinkers offered their critical theory of modern society as a form of therapy — not for Western individuals, but for Western societies and polities. Like Freud, their analysis was fairly pessimistic. They studied what they called massification, which they felt resulted in the degeneration of culture through mass media manipulation. But this was never meant as criticism for its own sake. It was always intended as a scientific study that would enable us to pursue social reconstruction: to free ourselves from the ideological blinders imposed by a consumerist mass culture and allow us to think freely again, humanistically reconceiving the possibility of living up to our

Enlightenment ideals. And again, like Freud, critical theory is itself a kind of talking cure. We weaken the power of mass media and corporate state manipulation by rendering it visible — by simply talking about it to the point where we can begin to recognize it and are therefore armed against it.

The thought of Ludwig Wittgenstein represents an interesting transition. Wittgenstein began as a regulative thinker, very much in the tradition of Ayer, as evidenced by the picture view of language found in his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. But the later Wittgenstein was thoroughly and self-consciously therapeutic — not curing social or psychic traumas per se, but seeking to cure philosophical confusions. He did so by showing that philosophical problems really arise from confusions among linguistic uses. So Wittgensteinian ordinary language analysis is also a talking cure. It is not deployed on neurotic or psychotic individuals, nor on sick societies. It is deployed on troubled philosophers who believe there are such things as genuine philosophical problems. What the analysis tries to show, by exposing the confusions arising from different linguistic uses, is that philosophical problems are not really about philosophy at all — they are about linguistic use, which is to say, ultimately, about life. And that makes these problems much more tractable, while also uniting the theory of philosophy with the practice of everyday life and ordinary language.

Pragmatism is also a philosophy that tells a story of transition from one conception of philosophic practice to another. In the hands of Charles Sanders Peirce in the nineteenth century, pragmatism was intended to be a purely regulative practice — indeed, it was first proposed in an essay called "How to Make Our Ideas Clear." One could not have a more regulative notion than that. But William James moved pragmatism in a therapeutic direction. He sought to use pragmatism to resolve metaphysical and psychological conflicts,

most famously in reconciling the "tough-minded," or empirically oriented, and the "tender-minded," or idealistically oriented, philosophical worldviews. James's talking cure takes the form of showing us what is practically at stake, in a psychological sense, in seemingly dry, abstract, and technical metaphysical disputes. Again, note how he does this: he unifies theory with practice, insisting that any theory must be judged on the basis of its implications for the conduct of our psychological lives.

But it is really John Dewey who directs pragmatic therapy towards society, as well as towards the practice of philosophy itself. Dewey historicized philosophy, and in doing so allowed us to see the irrational and often class-based forces that have led to fruitless dualisms — between subject and object, between mind and matter, between objectivity and subjectivity, and between truth and mere opinion. Such historicizing is therefore a kind of talking cure that frees us from the grip of what Dewey called the spectatorial view of knowledge, and allows us to embrace a more instrumental conception — one that demands that theory always be directly tied to practice. It is also worth noting that such an instrumental conception stresses a Darwinian fit between belief and changing social and cultural environments, leading us to think of philosophy and culture in general as following the same imperatives of evolution and change that we find in nature.

Edifying Philosophy

Finally, let us consider the third way of approaching philosophy: treating its practice as edifying. What we mean by "edifying" draws on the old classical and religious notion of edification — spiritual uplift and building. You will recall from the very beginning of this series that philosophy is about technical doctrines, but it is also about a sense of wonder and awe, and the desire to work out our spiritual or metaphysical posture towards being — to understand the

meaning of our lives and why we live as we do. It is precisely these questions that edifying philosophies focus on. Their central concerns are the meaning of life, the nature of individual existence, and the life of the spirit — questions that became even more urgent after Nietzsche's much-heralded death of God.

This practice obviously drew on a rich lineage of religious predecessors, from Augustine to fideists like Bayle and Pascal to the Kierkegaardians. But there was also a secular, proto-existential trajectory running from Descartes to Nietzsche. In our period, probably the first important figure in this practice is Edmund Husserl, who was critical to the development of edifying philosophy in the early twentieth century.

His invocation of a transcendental ego — the result of his first phenomenological reduction, or *epoché*, in which one abstracts from phenomenological experience all its particular empirical content — was meant to uncover consciousness as such: a kind of pure consciousness that was itself part of a quest for the ultimate basis of reality, a basis to be found in subjectivity. An obvious motivation was the desire to identify a new phenomenological source for the human spiritual essence, or soul. And we can see this exemplified in what is described as the second, or eidetic, reduction, in which Husserl claims that if one abstracts from consciousness as such, pure consciousness itself will reveal immanent essences and meanings. So the quest into the mind as pure mind, qua mind, discloses the ultimate structure of the universe — the secrets we have always sought.

Nonetheless, it is worth recalling that Husserl also had a regulative interest. Phenomenology was also meant to be a quest for epistemic certainty, for fixity. Husserl was a mathematician, and such fixity could only come from what he called an Archimedean standpoint —

a standpoint he sought to establish through his phenomenological reductions.

But probably much more influential than Husserl in the long run has been the work of Martin Heidegger. Heidegger pushed Husserl's phenomenology in a far more explicitly existential direction. Unlike his teacher Husserl, who was mathematically trained, Heidegger was theologically trained — a seminarian by formation — and therefore rejected mere scientific rationality in favor of what he called self-uncovering discourses: discourses of Dasein, concerned with uncovering our place in the world.

Heidegger therefore focused on the subjective experience of being-in-the-world — what it is like to be alive and to be part of the historical realm of contingency — in a quest for authentic being. He did so because he wanted to interrogate questions about our existence, our identity as individuals, the meaning of our lives, and how we ought to reconfigure and reconceive them. In this practice, he rejected what philosophers would usually consider systematic analysis, in favor of something he called hermeneutics — which we might better characterize as interpretive discourse: deep interpretations that are evocative but do not necessarily depend on factual correctness. He sought to use hermeneutics not to uncover the nature of the external world, but rather to disclose us to ourselves.

Now, obviously such issues carry very strong spiritual significance, and this is reflected in many of Heidegger's unusual philosophical moves — including his sacralization of Being as a new God (and I believe he even uses that phrase). But it also has a secular and straightforwardly existential implication, for the other central quest in Heidegger is authenticity as a life goal: the aim of learning to be who we are and to understand what we are.

Conclusion

In conclusion, as you look at the philosophy of the first half of the twentieth century, look at doctrine — but also look at the ways in which these thinkers were reconfiguring how philosophy itself should be practiced, in order to respond to the changing world in which they lived.

Lecture 62: James's Pragmatism

Professor Darren Staloff

Overview

William James is one of the principal figures of modern Anglo-American philosophy, and pragmatism — the philosophical movement he championed — is certainly one of the most important and enduring philosophical projects of the last hundred years.

I would argue that in many ways we could think of James's pragmatism as the American version of Nietzsche's perspectivalism, or perspectivism. And indeed there are a great many similarities between the thought of James and Nietzsche. They had similar influences, interests, and even views about philosophy, truth, and being, or metaphysics. Both were great admirers of Ralph Waldo Emerson. Both were profoundly affected by the Darwinian moment and the Darwinian revolution in scientific thought. Both were attracted to and schooled in idealism and romanticism. And perhaps most interestingly, neither had a technical philosophical training. As you will recall, Nietzsche was a philologist trained in classical languages. James was a Harvard-educated physician and one of the founders of modern psychology, who later took up an interest in philosophical speculation.

As regards their interests, both looked at philosophy from an intensely psychological perspective. In particular, religious psychology fascinated both figures. James, in fact, wrote two important works dealing with those issues: one more generally in *The Principles of Psychology*, and the second in his famous *Varieties of Religious Experience*.

There is, however, an important difference between them. Nietzsche was what we might call a philosophical psychologist — that is, he was interested in the philosophical implications to be derived from particular psychological states. James, by contrast, was a psychological philosopher: he was interested in the psychological implications of various philosophical positions.

James and Nietzsche Compared

As I have mentioned, there are significant commonalities between their views, and that may be a useful way of getting some rough handle on what pragmatism is about. Both are perspectivalists — which is to say, both are anti-realists, both in their interpretation of the external world and of the internal world. Both see reality as essentially unfinished and in some sense chaotic. And both perceive truth not as a copy of reality, but as a tool that a particular species uses to grapple with natural problems. And perhaps most importantly, both see metaphysics not as a doctrine about the nature of reality, but ultimately as a kind of spiritual consolation and projection of a lonely animal in an isolated universe.

The difference lies in the way each spins his perspectivalism. Nietzsche sees the lack of absolute truth as opening up the possibility — at least in his own case — of an almost morbid fascination with cruelty, elitism, and a snobbish contempt for the herd. James, by contrast, confronts exactly the same state of affairs — the lack of absolute truth — and sees in it a sort of philosophic charter to embrace tolerance, openness, and democratic egalitarianism. We can even see this difference reflected in the idiom each uses to describe the insights of perspectivism or pragmatism. Nietzsche describes truth as following the power principle: sentences are true if they help us fulfill our will to power. James, the American

— and perhaps the celebrant of American economic life — says that a true sentence has cash value: it helps us get a purchase on reality.

Nietzsche looks for truth as a way of allowing us to achieve domination rather than purchase. For Nietzsche, truth — since it is not absolute — is a lie or a great useful error. James also acknowledges that truth is not absolute, but says instead that it is nonetheless serviceable or helpful. One might think of this as two philosophers looking at the same philosophic situation: one seeing the glass as half empty and the other as half full. From an American perspective, then, I would urge us to think of James's pragmatism as a sort of Americanized — and, in some sense, adult — form of Nietzsche's adolescent insight into perspectivalism. By the time we arrive at James, we are no longer scandalized by the loss of absolute truth or a God's-eye point of view. But this does not mean we must therefore turn to ruthless recklessness — quite the opposite: it calls us to an even more careful and cautious calculation.

The Text of *Pragmatism* and Its Audience

I want to argue that this democratic ethos, which suffuses James's work, is best exemplified in the very rhetoric of the text of *Pragmatism*. The text originally originated as a series of lectures delivered at the Lowell Institute in Boston in 1906, and in the following year at Columbia. This is significant because the audience was mixed — including not only professionally trained philosophers but a fairly large number of laypersons — and the text is really pitched more to those laypersons than to the professionals. It is for that reason that *Pragmatism* is one of the most accessible and pleasurable works in twentieth-century philosophy.

While this strategy may have led to derision from philosophers who regarded the text as insufficiently rigorous, James believed that it

was the average person — the educated layperson — who was, and ought to be, the ultimate judge of philosophical issues. As he writes in the first lecture: "The finally victorious way of looking at things will be the most completely impressive way to the normal run of minds."

The Structure of This Lecture

What I want to do in this lecture is examine four different issues. First, how does James open his discussion — how does he present a way of interpreting the history of philosophy and philosophical disputation? Then we will look at what James meant by pragmatism, and we will see that he meant by it both a method and a genetic theory of truth. Next we will explore how James deploys that method to resolve metaphysical issues and disputes. And finally, we will examine how James expands that theory of truth in what he calls a pragmatic or instrumental fashion.

The Present Dilemma in Philosophy: Tender-Minded vs. Tough-Minded

Let us begin with the way James introduces us to philosophical speculation. He does so in his opening lecture, entitled "The Present Dilemma in Philosophy." James — quite controversially, I would argue — interprets the long-standing philosophical dispute that has emerged since the seventeenth century between, on the one hand, the rationalist and German idealist continental tradition, and on the other the empiricist and positivist traditions associated with Anglo-America, as fundamentally a clash of temperament between two different sorts of philosophical natures: those he calls the tender-minded and the tough-minded.

The tender-minded — by which he means the rationalists and German idealists — are, he argues, influenced by principles, hence their rationalism. They tend to be intellectualistic. They tend to be idealistic. They tend to be optimistic, religious in their orientation, they stress the importance of free will, they tend toward metaphysical monism — seeking to unify the universe under one simple overarching principle — and they tend, in his view, to be dogmatic.

The empiricists, by contrast, rather than reasoning from principles, tend to refer to facts, and are therefore sensationalistic in the sense that the senses are what they rely upon to build up our knowledge of the world. The world that empiricism constructs tends to be materialistic, which results in attitudes quite opposite to the tender-minded: pessimism, irreligion, fatalism, pluralism, and finally skepticism.

James shows that each of these different temperaments, and the philosophical traditions that emerge from them, has its virtues and its vices. The tender-minded are inspiring. They produce systems that fill us with awe and offer cosmological promise — but at an expense: the expense of one's scientific conscience. They demand that we believe in principles which violate our most advanced scientific understanding. The tough-minded preserve that scientific conscience, but at the expense of religion, hope, and psychological well-being. Indeed, one of the arguments James advanced, both here and in *Varieties of Religious Experience*, is that the tough-minded position leads, for certain souls — those he considered sensitive and melancholic (and he counted himself among them) — to psychological ennui and depression.

His point is that the rational, educated layperson who is not a trained philosopher wants the good things on both sides of the dispute. They want to have their cake and eat it too. And it is at this moment

that he introduces pragmatism as the means of achieving both goals. As he writes: "Most of us have a hankering for the good things on both sides of the line. Facts are good, of course — give us lots of facts. But principles are good — give us plenty of principles. The world is undoubtedly one if you look at it in one way, but it is as indubitably many if you look at it in another. Everything, of course, is necessarily determined, and yet, of course, our wills are free. A sort of free-will determinism is the true philosophy."

Pragmatism as Method

Having laid out this psychological interpretation of the history of philosophy, let us now turn to what James meant by pragmatism — that which would allow us to draw on the best of both traditions. For James, pragmatism is both a method and a theory of truth.

The method grows out of the work of Charles Sanders Peirce in the nineteenth century. Peirce had offered a pragmatic account of meaning that argued the meaning of an expression is determined by the experiences or consequences that would ensue under certain specific conditions if it were true. James paraphrases this as follows: "What difference would it practically make to anyone if this notion rather than that notion were true? If no practical difference whatever can be traced, then the alternatives mean practically the same thing and all dispute is idle. Whenever a dispute is serious, we ought to be able to show some practical difference that must follow from one side or the other's being right."

The pragmatic account of meaning, then, is this: you interpret a sentence based on the consequences we should expect, under discrete circumstances, if that sentence were true. What James does with this account of meaning is generalize it into an overarching method of settling metaphysical disputes and interpreting

philosophical doctrines. Such views and doctrines — in short, theories — are instruments of action according to James, not fixed and final answers to metaphysical enigmas.

Pragmatism as a Theory of Truth

The other part of pragmatism for James is pragmatism as a theory of truth. This was developed largely by F.C.S. Schiller and, after James, by John Dewey. It is what I have referred to before as a genetic theory of truth — one in which truth is something that happens to an idea or belief. To put it briefly: we invent new truths to cope with anomalous experiences, and such invention is constrained by the desire to change as few of our old beliefs as possible while preserving appearances. This is a notion we shall see later developed by Quine as a web of belief.

True beliefs, for James, are those that effectively marry new experiences to our old stock of truths — those beliefs which we might refer to, in the largest sense, as common sense. As James writes: "The true is the name of whatever proves itself to be good in the way of belief, and good, too, for definite assignable reasons."

Applying the Pragmatic Method to Metaphysical Disputes

Now let us see how James applies the pragmatic method to several long-standing metaphysical problems and disputes.

Materialism vs. Spiritualism

The first is the dispute between materialism and spiritualism that had become so central to philosophy from the seventeenth through the nineteenth centuries. James argues that if we look at this question retrospectively — that is, with an eye to our past experiences —

there is practically no difference between the two doctrines. Either posit can account for all the phenomena that have occurred up to the present. We can account for the natural history of the world on scientific principles — that is, materialism, the motion of matter following the laws physics has discovered — or we can account for it on spiritualist lines by invoking the notion of a providential deity. We might not be satisfied with either account, but both are logically consistent and coherent, and therefore both will account for all of our past experience.

In that sense, it might seem like a rather arid metaphysical discussion. But if we think about the future — if we approach these doctrines prospectively — there is a world of difference. Materialism teaches us that ultimately our sun will supernova and our planet will be destroyed; that ultimately our universe will collapse in on itself, and with it all our aspirations and projects will have meant nothing and will have been permanently obliterated. Materialism, prospectively, means a cutting off of hope. Spiritualism, on the other hand, means that there is some ground of hope — that somehow and somewhere our achievements and examples will persist, if only in the mind of God.

As James writes: "Here then lie the real meanings of materialism and spiritualism — not in hair-splitting abstractions about matter's inner essence or about the metaphysical attributes of God. Materialism means simply the denial that the moral order is eternal and the cutting off of ultimate hopes. Spiritualism means the affirmation of an eternal moral order and the letting loose of hope. Surely here is an issue genuine enough."

I want to pause and note something important. James has shown what this dispute hangs on. He has not made the choice for us. He has not resolved the dispute. That is for each individual to do for themselves.

Free Will vs. Determinism

James then engages the famous dispute about free will: are our wills autonomous, or are they determined within a causally necessary order? Traditionally, philosophers have argued this dispute in terms of moral culpability and punishment. The free-willists argue that if we are causally determined to perform all the acts we do, then we are not in fact responsible for those acts — rather, the causes of our acts are responsible. Those who take the opposite position have argued, as Hume did, that if we are not causally determined to act as we do, then there is no reason to suppose that our acts will be replicated in the future, and therefore punishment for crimes is nothing more than a kind of perverse vengeance.

James thinks this way of engaging the question of free will and determinism is misguided. In practical terms, the real question of culpability and punishment is resolved not by metaphysics or by philosophers, but by policemen, lawyers, and courtrooms. They take care of these issues.

What then does the issue really hang on? For James, at least for some people, determinism means that the future will resemble the present and the past — and this, again, can lead to pessimism and despair. Free will, on the other hand, pragmatically means that we can expect novelties in the future. As James writes: "Free will pragmatically means novelties in the world, the right to expect that in its deepest elements as well as in its surface phenomena, the future may not identically repeat and imitate the past. It holds up, therefore, improvement as at least possible, whereas determinism assures us that our whole notion of possibility is born of human ignorance."

For James, then, the whole point of free will is to make it possible for us to believe that the world can be made better — a doctrine he calls meliorism, in contrast to either optimism or pessimism. And again,

James has not resolved the dispute. He has simply shown what the critical issues are. We must decide each of these issues for ourselves.

God and Design

The third issue James engages is the question of God or design. It, again, just as in the other cases, has no retrodictive force. The past can be accounted for either by believing in God and design or by believing in the random motion of atoms. But again, its significance lies in our understanding of the future.

If we believe in God or design, it assures us of the doctrine that everything will ultimately work out in the end — that ultimately good will triumph in the universe. For James, this matters because if we believe there is no God and no design, then each individual bears personal responsibility for the moral order of his or her life and the world that surrounds them. For James — being the American can-do sort of character he is — that means we must almost always be in a state of moral urgency: almost always engaged in moral action, precisely to safeguard the moral nature of our universe. But if we believe in God and design, we know that even when we are not constantly acting on our moral agendas, everything will ultimately work out, which allows us to take what James calls a moral holiday — to occasionally set morality aside and enjoy aesthetic or other fulfilling experiences.

As he writes: "Our interest in religious metaphysics arises in the fact that our empirical future feels to us unsafe and needs some higher guarantee. And the belief in God and design is practically — pragmatically — nothing more than a source of such a guarantee, a reason for us to feel confident that ultimately right will win out."

And again, James has not said one ought to believe in God. That is a question for each individual temperament to resolve for itself.

James concludes this part of his analysis by arguing that the deployment of the pragmatic method really represents, for him, what he calls a philosophical Protestant Reformation — a rebellion against authority on behalf of the individual, with each person empowered to judge for themselves what metaphysical notions they need in order to live a full and richly rewarding life. He compares this to the Protestant Reformation, which also insisted on the priesthood of all believers — that each soul must face God without the mediation of a church. As he notes: "And as to papal minds, Protestantism has often seemed a mere mess of anarchy and confusion. Such, no doubt, will pragmatism often seem to ultra-rationalistic minds in philosophy. It will seem so much mere trash philosophically. But life wags on, all the same, and compasses its ends in Protestant countries. I venture to think that philosophical Protestantism will compass a not dissimilar prosperity."

The Pragmatic Theory of Truth: An Instrumental Account

Now let us turn to that last issue: the pragmatic account of truth, to which James devoted the latter part of his lecture series, offering a much richer and more complete account of what we might call an instrumental theory of truth.

The simplest way of putting it is that, like Nietzsche, James rejected the correspondence or copy theory of truth. That doctrine held that your ideas are true when they are accurate representations or copies of the objects they are about. If you look at a coffee mug, close your eyes, and form an idea of it, that idea would be true — or a copy — if it were more or less an accurate depiction.

James acknowledges that this notion of copying has intuitive appeal. But suppose, he asks, instead of forming an idea of the coffee mug,

you were asked to form an idea of its molecular and atomic structure. You might form a reasonable conception of what that would be, but it is quite clear there is no sense in which you could have a visual representation or image of it. There is no way to picture it. And his point is that that is not, in fact, what truth does. Truth does not picture the world — it helps us get a grasp on things. In this sense, we might think of sentences or beliefs not as copies of the world that are eternally true if they mirror reality, but rather as principles that allow us to manipulate the world and are therefore made true by verification.

As James writes: "True ideas are those that we can assimilate, validate, corroborate, and verify. False ideas are those that we cannot. Truth happens to an idea. It becomes true, is made true by events."

True beliefs are, in fact, instruments of action, not copies of the world or thoughts in God's mind. In this sense, we might think of truth as a primitive term — a term that cannot itself be defined — in the same way that "good" is, for a pragmatist, a primitive term. "Good" is a compliment one pays to actions: when one says an action is good, one is enjoining others to copy it. Similarly, the true is the expedient in the way of belief — a compliment we pay to beliefs. This belief is working, therefore we call it true, just as the good is that which works in the way of action. And both "true" and "good" are applied for specific and definite reasons.

Implications: Humanism and Anti-Realism

There are some important implications of this doctrine. First, it destroys any conception of absolute truth, except perhaps as a normative ideal we might all converge upon at some indefinitely distant endpoint. But perhaps more importantly, James argues that

this theory represents the first genuinely humanistic interpretation of truth.

Consider why. First, it tells us that the world is not a fixed given to which we must correspond — we need not subject ourselves to the world in order to attain truth. Quite the opposite: it follows the essential credo of humanism that man is the measure of the world. Truths exist for us and by us. The world is, in a very real sense, made over in our image by our truths.

What does this mean? James is pointing out, as Nietzsche had done in perspectivism, that our truths are embedded in sentences, and the terms of those sentences parse our experience. For an infant, the world does not come pre-parsed into objects like coffee mugs, lecterns, and neckties — the infant experiences it as what James famously called a blooming, buzzing confusion. It is our language that helps us reify the world into the objects we name. And in that way, as we produce new names and new conceptual schemes, we change the nature of our universe.

We once believed that all objects were made exclusively of substances. Then we came to believe they were made up of one prime substance: matter. Some physicists today might tell us that objects are not ultimately made of matter at all, but of energy — that energy is the fundamental posit. James's point is that we remake the world every time we adopt one of these new conceptual schemes. We make the truth as well as the falsehood. As Nietzsche would say, all our beliefs are human, all too human. James puts it differently: "The trail of the human serpent is over all." And that is the essence of the humanist insight — that you cannot separate the human contribution from the world as it is in and of itself.

We have no awareness of a world prior to our interpretation of it under some description or conceptual scheme. The pre-schematic

phenomenal world of the philosophers is itself an abstraction from experience. In and of itself, our experience without language and conceptual categories would be nothing more than a state of chaos and flux. By naming things and properties, we break up that flux of experience, parse it, and humanize it — by which we mean, we make it serviceable and useful for our human biological, social, and psychological needs.

The implication is that our culture constantly changes or mutates in an almost Darwinian fashion according to our changing dictates and needs. Beliefs are called true when they have survival value for us. And we might think of common sense as simply the fund of such beliefs — those that have demonstrated survival value and are still working for us — the set of effective beliefs and posits that still pass muster.

James defends this perspectivalism, or anti-realism, against his rationalist critics: "Now, the idea of this loose universe affects your typical rationalist in much the same way as freedom of the press might affect a veteran official in the Russian Bureau of Censorship. It affects him as the swarm of Protestant sects affects the Papist onlooker. In other spheres of life it is true that we have got used to living in a state of relative insecurity. The authority of the state and that of an absolute moral law have resolved themselves into experiences. And holy church has resolved itself into meeting houses. Not so as yet within the philosophical classrooms." And that, in fact, is the goal of pragmatism.

By leaving solutions open — by simply proposing a method and an account of truth — pragmatism allows each individual, whether tough-minded or tender-minded, to choose how best to square their experiences with the fund of beliefs they have inherited.

Lecture 63: Freud's Psychology of Human Nature

Professor Dennis Dalton

Overview

We have two lectures on Freud's theory of human nature and his classic work, *Civilization and Its Discontents*. Who was Sigmund Freud? Well, among all of the theorists we could treat, he perhaps needs no introduction, especially in the United States.

He was born in 1856, thirty-eight years after Karl Marx. Both men were born into Jewish families, but both distanced themselves from religion. They both became atheists, and yet both were profound moralists — even, we might say, prophets. Freud grew up in Vienna, Austria, where he attended the university. His old apartment in Vienna can still be visited; it is where he lived for most of his life and practiced psychoanalysis. But more interesting than his apartment in Vienna, I think, is his home library and museum in London, England.

He lived there for only the last year of his life, from 1938 to 1939. It is the place to which he moved many of his possessions — or at least what he was able to take with him when he fled Vienna to escape Nazi persecution.

Continuing in the spirit of my tourist guide's role — as when I discussed Marx's tomb in Highgate Cemetery in London — after I suggest you have seen Marx's granite head in the new Highgate Cemetery (having taken the Northern Underground line to the Highgate stop and walked perhaps fifteen minutes), I suggest that in the afternoon you visit the Freud Museum. You will switch from the Northern Line to the Bakerloo Line, alight at the Swiss Cottage stop, and follow the signs — clearly marked in this case — to Freud's

home and museum, walking about five minutes to 20 Maresfield Gardens in North London.

As you enter his home, on the ground floor you will find Freud's memorabilia. He was fascinated with archaeology in particular, and he collected many artifacts from all over the world. He believed — and this is the intriguing part — that in psychoanalysis he had discovered a kind of archaeology of the human mind: an excavation of the mysteries of the unconscious. After you have explored the ground floor, you will see its centerpiece: the very couch and the very chair where he and his patients conducted those excavations — those daunting journeys into the self, into the mind — that constituted the substance of the method of psychoanalysis.

Going upstairs, you will find a splendid exhibition of Freud's work, a library of relevant books, and a room where a home movie is regularly shown. The film was made by Freud's distinguished daughter, Anna Freud, who eventually carried on his work in London and, for many years after her father's death, became a renowned analyst in her own right. I suggest that before you leave the home, you take some time to browse in the library and reflect on Freud's singular and eminent contribution to human thought. Because whatever you may think of psychoanalysis — whether you find it compelling or not — the sheer originality of Freud's ideas and their consequent influence in America are staggering.

Proof of this is evident not only in the London museum, but also in the fine exhibition of his work that appeared in 1998 and 1999 in Washington, D.C., and then at the Jewish Museum in New York City. Towards the end of that exhibition, there appears in large bold letters one of the many significant quotations the show provides: this one from W.H. Auden, who writes, "Freud is no longer a name or a person — Freud has become an outlook." That exhibition demonstrates this truth by showing how Freud's language and ideas

have entered American films and television, offering a remarkable compilation of excerpts and clips from dozens of movies and TV programs showing how Freud's very language has become a part of our language. As Peter Gay, Freud's eminent biographer, has said: we all speak Freud now, whether correctly or not.

This is all the more remarkable because his language and ideas are not happy, not cheerful, not uplifting for the most part — because at their center is a profoundly pessimistic theory. Freud himself freely acknowledged that he was a pessimist. That is a term he applied to himself; not many people do so, but he admitted it. He said once: "When you think of my thought, remember Rembrandt — a little light, but a lot of darkness."

Freud's Theory of Human Nature: Comparisons with Plato and Marx

Freud's is a dark vision of humanity, and it rests on his piercing and compelling theory of human nature. When we compare Freud's theory of human nature with those of other great figures and theorists, we note that Freud followed Plato's conception of the tripartite self — in the way that we discussed, as you will recall, in connection with Marx — that is, each self has three components, three aspects. For Plato, those three components were reason, spirit or conscience, and desire.

There is, however, a crucial difference between Plato and Freud, even though on the face of it they appear strikingly similar in positing the same elements within the self. Whereas Plato believed that reason could and should rule the personality, Freud asserted that reason was inevitably the weakest part of the self, because people are fundamentally irrational beings.

Plato sets forth in his dialogue the *Phaedrus* — a magnificent work we have not yet discussed — a metaphor for his concept of the tripartite self. Socrates in the *Phaedrus* says: "I am now dividing the self into three parts." Those parts, he tells us metaphorically, are a charioteer and two horses. The charioteer symbolizes reason in control of the two horses: one representing the noble passion of spirit, courage, and honor; the other representing the dark desires, the lustful appetites of the self. Plato believed that in a just person, reason could rule — that the charioteer could keep these two horses under control. Reason, according to Plato, keeps the desires in check and uses them to motivate the personality, enabling just leadership in a just state.

Freud deemed all of this wishful thinking. He disagreed with Plato entirely on this point, because from Freud's perspective this kind of rationalism did not rest on a knowing view of the self. From Freud's viewpoint, reason could never control the passions, because we are driven by unconscious instincts that we can never possibly know. Knowledge of the self, then, lies beyond the reach of reason.

If we contrast Freud's view of human nature further with that of another optimist and rationalist — Karl Marx — we find that Marx too, as we noted, held a concept of the tripartite self: the natural self, the alienated self, and the species self. These represent three distinctive sets of needs existing within us and vying with one another for expression. Marx felt that the needs of the natural self were distorted by an exploitative system — specifically, the economic system of capitalism. Eventually, Marx believed, historical evolution would usher in the realization of the needs of the species self in a communist society. After capitalism would come communism, and human nature would find its true expression in species consciousness — a rational and just system in which alienation would end.

Freud rejects this as emphatically as he rejects the optimism and idealism of Plato. He argues that Marx's idea of a benign natural self followed by a humane species self is hopelessly and irrevocably idealistic and utopian. Refuting Marx directly, Freud contends that our basic needs are not benign as Marx had described them — recall Marx's subsistence needs and the needs for sex and productive labor. Rather, our fundamental needs are malign rather than benign. Our deepest needs are aggression — the willful desire to hurt others, to seek domination in a lustful fashion — and ultimately, often, the desire for our own self-destruction: Thanatos, the death wish, which became so central to Freud's philosophy, especially in *Civilization and Its Discontents*.

Here, then, is a preeminent realist who takes Hobbes's view of human nature — the pain-pleasure calculus and Hobbes's insistence that people are not rational beings but profoundly irrational ones. Freud takes Hobbes's view rather than Plato's and thereby becomes the great realist of the twentieth century. He is far more similar to Machiavelli in his thinking about human nature than he is to Plato or any of the idealists. It is Hobbes's view specifically — that reason is a weak element of the personality and that the desire for domination is far more powerful — that most profoundly connects Freud with Hobbes.

Against Marx, then, Freud confidently proclaims his own pessimism and derides Marx's optimism. The foundation for this assured rejection of Plato and Marx is Freud's conviction that through the science of psychoanalysis he has discovered truths about human nature — and especially about the unconscious — that had not been seen before him. It is the theory of the unconscious, Freud says, that constitutes his specific claim to a new, unprecedented, and revolutionary insight into the nature of human nature and of society itself.

Freud and Marx therefore differ profoundly, above all, on human nature. Marx believed that human nature is capable of infinite development, leading ultimately to the classless society. Freud harbors no such optimistic view of human nature or of humanity's ability to achieve happiness and contentment. According to Freud, the inevitable lot of humankind is pain and suffering, arising both from one's own psychic alienation and from one's painful interactions with other human beings.

Freud's Theory of the Personality

Let us now look closely at Freud's theory of the personality and understand the form it takes, for this is at the heart of his thought and of his continuing profound contribution to our thinking today — a contribution whose influence, whether we call ourselves pessimists or optimists, seems to me enormous.

Recall that Marx's central concern was with the cash nexus. We might say that Freud's concern is with the "bash nexus" — that is, with the forces not of money but of aggression. Freud, in his *New Introductory Lectures* and elsewhere, outlines his theory of the tripartite self. Let us note as we examine it the systematic nature of the framework and the ingeniously original way in which Freud assembles a contribution to a philosophy of human nature quite unlike anything we have encountered before, either in political or in social theory.

The Id

First among the three parts of the self is the id. Freud defines the id as a bundle of instincts aimed at gaining pleasure and avoiding pain. Unlike Marx, Freud believes that this natural self — this bundle of instincts — is and always will be dominant, because it exists as the unconscious part of our personality. We must emphasize this

unconscious nature, because neither Marx nor Plato had any conception of an unconscious self. This is truly Freud's discovery.

The id is the reservoir of the unconscious. Freud describes it as "a cauldron of seething excitations," always bubbling within the self and demanding expression. And because we are by definition unaware of our unconscious wishes and needs, we can never appreciate the enormously powerful role the id plays in shaping our everyday behavior.

The id, we might say, is the spoiled brat within us. It is endlessly demanding, impulsive, irrational, asocial, selfish, and pleasure-seeking. When other parts of the personality attempt to contain it, the id asserts itself in an uncontrollable, unruly, infantile way. It makes demands that cannot possibly be fulfilled, because the id refuses to make choices or recognize limitations and contradictions. When the voice of reason — in the form of the outside world or of the ego — speaks to the id and urges it to consider logical choice and rational thinking, the ego might say, "You may have this, or this, or that," and the id responds: "I want this and that and that and that — and I want it now, and I want all of it." The id is impulsive. And when it makes its demands in this way, it does so in the most aggressive, dominating, and hurtful manner imaginable. From Freud's point of view, sex and aggression are fused, and these two instincts, through the id, dominate the entire personality.

Between the two — sex and aggression — as we will see when we turn to *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Freud places the greater emphasis on aggression: on the instincts of Thanatos, those dark, self-destructive instincts that cause us to inflict harm on others but also on ourselves, and from which we derive a grim and terrible pleasure.

The Ego

The second part of the personality is the ego. It is the least powerful part of the personality from Freud's point of view, yet the most powerful from Plato's. From Freud's viewpoint, this least powerful part of the personality represents common sense and moderation, appealing to the superior power of the id and begging it to listen to reason.

The term "ego" is, I think, misleading, because in everyday usage we call someone a "big ego," meaning they have an inflated view of themselves. In Freud's theory, the ego is not the proud, inflated part of the self that expression suggests. The ego, in Freud's framework, is cautious and rational — a voice of common sense that tries to restrain both the id and the superego from their irrational threats of domination. If the id is guided by the pleasure principle, the ego follows the reality principle, because it is, as Freud says, "turned toward the external world." It must consider the demands of objective reality. So if the id is the brat within us, the ego is the wimp within us — the "wuss," to use the more current expression. It is reasonable and modest, but it is weak, ineffective, and hopelessly incapable of containing the demands placed upon it. It struggles desperately, as Freud says, against the id.

The ego has, Freud tells us, three masters. It must answer to the id, to the superego, and to the real world, mediating between the wild and wishful dream world of the id and the restraints imposed by the other two. The ego is the broker, the negotiator, the conciliator. When the id makes its incessant and insatiable demands for sexual gratification and total domination, the ego attempts to assert control. But in this task, the ego is, as Freud often says, "hopelessly embattled and besieged." While the id is the seething cauldron of excitations and instincts demanding satisfaction, the ego is embattled and besieged, outdone by the superior powers of the

other two parts of the personality. It calls for help from wherever it can find it — from the outside world, but especially from the superego — yet it is usually punished for its efforts.

The Superego

The third part of the personality is the superego. It resembles the id in one key respect: it is totally irrational. But in all other respects it is unlike the id, and it represents the id's main adversary within us — the other great source of internal conflict in our incurably, hopelessly, irredeemably alienated and split self.

The superego is more powerful than the ego but less so than the id. If the id is the brat and the ego is the wimp, then the superego is the preacher — the stern parent of the self, the conscience, the sense of guilt that sets impossible demands of moral influence and moral perfection. It is shaped by parental training; whereas the id is comprised of inborn instincts, the superego is developed after birth through socialization, from parents and from society.

The superego has two distinct components: the conscience and the ego ideal. The ego ideal is that internalized standard of perfection that parents, for example, set before their children — insisting that their child can certainly achieve a perfect score on an exam, whether an SAT, LSAT, or any other standardized test. The child will respond through its ego: "I'm not sure that's entirely reasonable." And the parent will reply: "Of course it's reasonable. You are, after all, a reflection of me." That is the way the superego works — insisting on irrational and impossible standards of perfection. The superego then punishes with guilt, and it can also reward with a measure of gratification if one strives to meet its unreasonable and unreachable expectations. In these respects, the superego often opposes both the pleasure principle of the id and the reality principle of the ego with what we might call the morality principle, calling especially upon religion to reinforce it.

It is no wonder, then — as Freud says — that given this terrible predicament of the split personality, life is not easy. We find the drama of this suffering playing itself out at length in *Civilization and Its Discontents*.

An Introduction to Civilization and Its Discontents

We will turn to *Civilization and Its Discontents* for the remaining moments of this lecture, and then take up its main argument in the next. At the beginning of the book, Freud tells us plainly that life is suffering. He says that while we strive for happiness, happiness is in fact very difficult to come by. Our purpose in life, he states at the outset, is to maximize pleasure and minimize pain. But this is not easily attained, because of a fundamental problem: we can only experience happiness in contrast to unhappiness, and it is unhappiness that is far more frequently experienced than happiness could ever be. We are so constituted that we need unhappiness in order to enjoy life, and therefore we are plunged so often into states of disquiet, distress, and dissatisfaction.

He describes us as threatened with suffering from three directions — a theme we will explore at much greater length in the next lecture. The first is from our own body: from our own physical decay and the mortality we must confront as we grow old. The second is from nature — from accident and chance, from what we might call the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune.

But that is not the worst form of pain, nor the worst source of suffering. In a remarkable passage near the beginning of *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Freud tells us that the worst form of suffering — worse than physical decay, worse even than the way fate treats us — is our everyday interactions with other people. That form of suffering is the most awful of all, because it is loaded with a particular kind of

pain. Others are out to get us, out to hurt us. But worst of all, we as irrational beings are ourselves inclined to hurt others. Patterns of human relationship develop — chilling patterns in which cycles of mutual recrimination cannot be stopped. It is this kind of lustful, aggressive disposition that underlies the pessimism of Freud.

When we take up the rest of the story in the next lecture, I ask that you not be discouraged by the darkness of this account — there is much more to come. We will resume with Freud's theory of suffering in *Civilization and Its Discontents*.

Lecture 64: Freud's Discontents

Professor Dennis Dalton

Overview: Freud and Marx on Alienation

We resume our analysis of Freud's political and social theory by turning now primarily to his classic text, *Civilization and Its Discontents*. But first, let us summarize the central problem when we compare Freud with Marx.

For both of them, we confront an acute difficulty. The human predicament, as seen by Freud and Marx alike, is one of suffering from a severe malady — a malady called the alienated split self. That simply means a divided self: a self so torn by conflicting desires or needs that it exists in a state of chronic suffering. The personality in conflict is a common theme of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but Freud and Marx bring to it a thoughtful, controversial, and profound dialogue that we want to try to capture. We are divided within ourselves between conflicting sets of expectations and aspirations.

The question is: what is the cause of this conflict? Both Freud and Marx would say that we lack consciousness — consciousness of who we are and of why we are in such a painful state of alienation. And what are we alienated from?

From Marx's point of view, we are alienated from our essence — from what he calls our species-being, our best selves. We are striving to become the persons that we need and want to be, but historically we have not yet arrived there. If we could find a system — namely, the communist system — that would reinforce, bring out, and elicit all of our best qualities, then we would be able to reach this species-being consciousness.

Freud believes that a profound alienation pervades the personality, but for him it is essentially twofold. We are alienated within ourselves — the id alienated from the superego, and both of those alienated from the ego. Let us look at this more carefully, for it was a central theme of the first lecture on Freud, and it deserves clarification.

The two key powers in the personality, as we saw, are those of the id — the aggressive power of the unconscious — and the superego — the power of guilt and of the ego ideal, the high expectations set for us by our parents and by society. A terrible struggle takes place between these two forces within us: the id demanding satisfaction, and the superego — the second most powerful force in the personality — insisting that those demands cannot be met, and then punishing the id as much as possible for its aggressive and demanding ways. That is one conflict, and it is an irremediable conflict within the personality.

But then there is the other source of alienation and conflict: the joint opposition of both the id and the superego against reason — against the ego. The ego is strengthened by its contact with external reality, but it is unfortunately the weakest force within the personality and therefore unable to resolve the alienation. The ego's appeals to reason and to the external world cannot contain the enormously powerful force of the id's unconscious.

The Question of Remedies

If this is Freud's account of the human predicament against Marx's account, then what remedies do the two thinkers see for alienation? From Marx's point of view, the prognosis is optimistic. He has diagnosed the problem as the capitalist system, and therefore his prognosis is that the capitalist system will historically fail and give way to the evolution of a wholly new kind of society — a society that

will allow us to understand our universal identity with one another. The barriers that separate us, such as religion and nationalism, will fall, and we will come to understand our species-consciousness, our species-being. Marx would say that time is definitely on our side. We will grow out of adolescence, and the remedy is history itself.

For Freud, this prognosis is wrong, and his own prognosis is at best guarded. The remedy he sets forth is analysis. He is the author and founder of psychoanalysis. But psychoanalysis is open only to a few; the masses will probably continue on their destructive paths and perhaps destroy us all. Alienation, then, is inevitable among the vast majority.

From Freud's point of view, conflict is destructive rather than constructive. Marx would say that at times class conflict can hasten the movement of history and is therefore constructive. From Freud's point of view, it is wholly destructive. We strive not to cure or to overcome, but to contain, to cope. And as we will see, *Civilization and Its Discontents* sets forth certain coping mechanisms. In this struggle with the suffering that surrounds us and the inner conflict within, the best solution we can find is analysis — an analysis that can skillfully and professionally strengthen our ego, our powers of reason. That is our last and best hope.

Both Marx and Freud agree that we can best confront the problem of alienation by raising our consciousness. Marx would say this means joining the Communist Party or something like it — a progressive political organization that would hasten the movement of history insofar as that can be done. From Freud's point of view, we can raise our consciousness to some extent through analysis.

But Freud is fundamentally at odds with Marx regarding the economic versus the psychological factors involved. Marx is basically an economic determinist who believes that the economy may rescue

us as it develops into a fully realized species-being communist economy. That will ultimately raise our consciousness, but no amount of consciousness-raising now is going to produce the new economy he envisions. That can be accomplished only by history — a certain historical moment is necessary to usher in the ideal economic state — and only a class revolution at the right moment can provide the remedy.

Freud, by contrast, is not an economic but a psychological determinist, who believes that the unconscious remains the key determinant of our behavior. It is within us, and therefore determined. But the catch is that even though the source of determinism is within us — within the sphere of the unconscious — we cannot know it. That is the difficulty. Our ego is besieged, embattled, and weak in comparison to the id and the superego, and it is the ego alone that is capable of shaping our consciousness. We try at best to strengthen it, but even at best we can know only a tiny fraction of that vast reservoir of determining forces within us called the unconscious. So we strive to reinforce our ego, to prevent it from caving in and surrendering to a runaway id. But this is difficult, because there is not only the runaway id to contend with — there are also the terrible forces of guilt and impossible ideal expectations confronting us at every turn.

The Historical Context of Civilization and Its Discontents

It is a grim story from Freud's point of view. And while it may be grim, we must note, as we return to *Civilization and Its Discontents*, that Freud was writing this book in 1929 — at a particularly terrible time in his own life. Several factors were contributing to his personal misery, and the pessimism that flows from *Civilization and Its*

Discontents follows not only logically from the theoretical system he had constructed, but also understandably from his own personal experiences during the decade before he wrote it.

First, there was Freud's personal horror at the bloodshed and senseless brutality he witnessed during the First World War. Everything he saw during that immensely tragic theater of war disillusioned him and drove him toward despair. After that, by 1929, his disillusionment with the Bolshevik Revolution was complete, as he had watched it drift into Stalinism and hideous aggression. He was a Jew living in Vienna and witnessing the rise of Hitler and the growing popularity of the Nazis in Germany. There was also his sense of financial insecurity: Freud was an extremely perspicacious individual, capable of foreseeing on the horizon the financial catastrophe that was approaching, even if he could not anticipate the full enormity of the Great Depression that would arrive shortly after he completed *Civilization and Its Discontents*.

And then, perhaps most of all, there is his personal struggle with cancer. He was suffering at this time from cancer of the mouth, first diagnosed in the early 1920s, and it was now causing him severe pain and, as a physician himself, acute anxiety — for he understood all too well what lay ahead. Within the next decade, it would kill him.

So there were many deeply personal reasons why Freud should have been in despair. It seems that any single one of those factors might have been enough to plunge a thoughtful person into a sense of profound disillusionment. But Freud faced all of them simultaneously — and he was intelligent enough as a thinker to understand clearly both the crisis that the world was in and the nature of his own personal crisis.

Coping Mechanisms in Civilization and Its Discontents

It is with that background that we continue our analysis of *Civilization and Its Discontents*. Recall from the first lecture that we were examining the degree of suffering Freud perceives — not only in his own case, but throughout humankind. Suffering comes from three directions: from the physical decay of the human body (the kind Freud was then experiencing as a cancer patient), from the suffering that fate brings us — the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune — and finally from the suffering caused by our everyday, inescapable interaction with others, given the enormous aggression and pain that pervades human relationships.

As a result of the suffering that is part of the human condition, Freud outlines in *Civilization and Its Discontents* a number of coping mechanisms that he does not recommend, but rather, as a realist, simply describes. These are the ways people strive to contain their suffering and cope with what they find around them.

Intoxication

The first and most obvious coping mechanism is a chemical solution — intoxication. We reach for the crudest palliative we know: what Freud calls the "drowner of cares." This solution is only very temporary, and if indulged in too much it causes injury. At best, Freud calls it "a useless waste of a large quota of energy."

Isolation

The second coping mechanism is isolation. Since one of the chief sources of suffering he identifies is simply the interaction with other people, one solution is to become a hermit — to withdraw from one's environment and seek solace in continuing solitude. But from Freud's point of view, this is again only a temporary solution, and at

best available only to those willing to opt out of humanity altogether.

Sublimation

The third type of coping mechanism — and the one to which Freud devotes the most attention — is sublimation. Sublimation is defined as a way of finding socially acceptable responses and releases for one's aggression: for example, in sports, especially contact sports, where one can let it all out on the playing field. Freud discusses, in this context, several different forms of sublime expression — that is, of aggressive energy that society sanctions as worthwhile or respectable.

First, there is work, particularly the work of the artist or the scientist, which is highly valued by society. He says this psychical and intellectual kind of work — the artist's joy in creating, the scientist's satisfaction in solving problems or discovering truths — is a way of sublimating the drives and the aggression we find within us. But he says work is only a mild solution for our aggressive drives, because most work does not satisfy us at all, as Marx had pointed out. And even if we get the most satisfaction possible from our work, the feeling of satisfaction is mild, Freud says, compared to that derived from satisfying crude and primary instinctual impulses. Freud illustrates this with characteristic bluntness: we can imagine a professional baseball player hitting a grand slam home run in a World Series game at just the right moment, and all the satisfaction that comes from slamming that ball. Nevertheless, from Freud's point of view, the intensity of that satisfaction is mild compared to taking a baseball bat and striking your worst enemy over the head with it — that really gives one a sense of satisfaction. So sublimation through work is mild and available only to a few. For work to serve as a satisfactory release for our energies, Freud says, it has to be freely chosen and professional.

Beyond work, there is art. Freud says we can enter into the world of fantasy through art, film, or other enjoyments of that kind. But that is only, in his phrase, a "temporary narcosis" — a way of managing for a while, of entering an escape. It cannot last forever. We can go to a film, lose ourselves for a couple of hours, but then we must return to this world of suffering.

Freud then, quite significantly, analyzes religion as a form of sublimation. He says that religion offers "a protection against suffering through a delusional remolding of reality" — one made by a considerable number of people in common. The religions of mankind, he says, must be classed among the mass delusions of this form of sublimation. We can enter into religion as we enter into art — into a world of fantasy. But it is delusional. Freud's point is therefore that both art and religion are great escapes: art, including film, offers through fantasizing a momentary relief from reality, while religion can offer a more serious and long-term relief into a world of illusion. But neither is ultimately satisfactory.

Love

If not through work, art, or religion, then what about love? Freud analyzes love as a means of release and says that sexual love gives us our most intense experience of an overwhelming sensation of pleasure in our search for happiness. Romantic love — entering into this world of romance — is a perfect example of sublimation. Love, after all, is at heart just lust: aggressive energy that becomes, through romance, sublime. And so we call it not lust but love.

The problem, however, he says, is that the weak side of this technique of living is easy to see — otherwise, no human being would ever have thought of abandoning this path to happiness for any other. We would all simply seek out love. But the weak side is this: "we are never so defenseless against suffering as when we love,

never so seriously unhappy as when we have lost our loved object or its love."

A sad commentary, then, on this form of sublimation. And later in his discussion of love, Freud observes that because people have understood and experienced this truth — that they are made utterly miserable when the object of their love is lost, whether through death or unfaithfulness — some people seek another way of expressing their love: namely, loving all people, loving all being. He cites the example of St. Francis, who is not pursuing lust or sexual expression but rather loving even the birds. This approach has something to commend it, Freud grants: St. Francis can say that he loves all people and all animals, and there is no likelihood of all people and all animals vanishing. He will always have something to love, and in that satisfaction of finding release, St. Francis and those who embrace universal love can find consolation.

But Freud has two main objections to this view — the idea that one can love everybody. First, he says, "a love that does not discriminate seems to me to forfeit a part of its own value by doing an injustice to its object." It demeans love to say that we love the birds just as we love our spouse or partner. And second, the realist observes, not all people are worthy of love.

Civilization as Collective Superego

So this is the reality that Freud exposes. With desperation, humanity is trying to find coping mechanisms that will relieve the pain and suffering that is everywhere around. Work, art, religion, love, romance — and everywhere there are problems. This is inherent in the human predicament.

But it gets even worse. If it were not already bad enough that the collective id is always within us, tormenting us with these aggressive

energies, the collective force of civilization burdens us with awful guilt when we fail to meet the expectations of that collective force. Civilization thus represents a mass or collective superego that is certainly not concerned with reality, but only with the task of imposing harsher and harsher moral codes on this mass id — this aggressive force that is causing us so much misery.

The problem is that when the great contest between the mass collective id and the mass collective superego takes place, these two forces meeting only make the situation worse, because both are equally irrational. Religion in particular takes the idea of love and uses it for its own purpose. As Freud says, it sets up an impossible moral demand. One of the ideal demands of civilized society is: *Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself*. This commandment is known throughout the world; it is undoubtedly older than Christianity, which puts it forth as its proudest claim.

And Freud, in one of the more wryly humorous passages in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, asks: how can this be? Why should we love our neighbor as ourselves? What if our neighbor is a stranger who has nothing in common with us? Why should we love that stranger — especially if the stranger is unkind to us? And yet, Freud says, there is a second commandment which seems to him even more incomprehensible and which arouses still stronger opposition: also among the great world religions is the injunction to love thine enemies. What more preposterous and absurd ideal commandment could one devise?

So the mass force of civilization is trying — irrationally — to cope with the mass aggressive id by insisting that the id must not harm its neighbor, which it very much wants to do, but rather love its neighbor. And the absurdity of this, from Freud's point of view, is particularly evident when we confront the reality of human nature and the fact that it is so uncontainable.

He writes — and this is one of his most striking passages:

The element of truth behind all this, which people are so ready to disavow, is that men are not gentle creatures who want to be loved and who at the most can defend themselves if they are attacked. They are, on the contrary, creatures among whose instinctual endowments is to be reckoned a powerful share of aggressiveness. As a result, their neighbor is for them not only a potential helper or sexual object, but also someone who tempts them to satisfy their aggressiveness on him, to exploit his capacity for work without compensation, to use him sexually without his consent, to seize his possessions, to humiliate him, to cause him pain, to torture and to kill him. Homo homini lupus — Man is a wolf to man.

Freud then asks who, in the face of all experience of life and of history, has the courage to dispute this assertion. The world's religions, of course, do have the courage to dispute it — insisting that in the face of the savage desire to harm one another, as demonstrated so vividly in the First World War, we must love our enemies. But this, from Freud's perspective, is the very definition of an impossible command.

Freud's Critique of Marxism

Freud specifically attacks Marxism — not as one of the world's religions, but as one of the secular religions that fantasizes about the elimination of aggressiveness in order to achieve a communist society. The communists believe, Freud says, that they have found the path of deliverance from our ills. He then goes on to summarize, in a remarkably lucid way, Marx's core argument: if only we could change the system, the self will follow. Freud's counter-argument is simple and devastating: we *are* the system. We comprise the system. How can it be that if we merely change the system, everything will

become peace, harmony, sweetness, and light? It cannot. The problem is within us — within the constitution of the human personality itself. Aggressiveness, Freud says, was not created by property. If we do away with property, as Marx proposes, aggressiveness will remain. Because aggression forms the basis of every relation of affection and love among people; there is no act of humanity free from the lustful desire to dominate — the desire to aggress or to harm others.

And in one of the most compelling passages in the book, Freud writes:

It is always possible to bind together a considerable number of people in love, so long as there are other people left over to receive the manifestations of their aggressiveness. In this respect, the Jewish people scattered everywhere have rendered most useful services to the civilizations of the countries that have been their hosts. But unfortunately, all the massacres of the Jews in the Middle Ages did not suffice to make that period more peaceful and secure for their Christian fellows.

Freud died in 1939. But with his perspicacity, he could easily have foreseen the Holocaust — and not only foreseen it, but understood it. He would not have been surprised.

Lecture 65: A.J. Ayer and Logical Positivism

Professor Darren Stalloff

Introduction: The Historical Context of Logical Positivism

Logical positivism is one of the most influential, important, and interesting philosophical movements of the twentieth century. In recent years it has fallen under heavy criticism and has really declined in importance. But I would argue that such critics often fail to see the logical positivists in their own historical context. In fact, the positivists were responding to two important phenomena in their intellectual environment, and it is those phenomena which help us understand what motivated the emergence of logical positivism in the first place.

The Two Motivating Phenomena

The Proliferation of Speculative Metaphysics

The first of these phenomena was the profusion of speculative metaphysical systems that had begun in the nineteenth century and run through the early twentieth century in what we might call the post-Kantian epoch. We might think here of Hegelian idealism, of Schopenhauer's claim that the world is will and representation, of Bergson's embrace of the *élan vital* — all of which, from a positivist point of view, threaten to reduce philosophy to a series of equally absurd flights of imaginative and speculative fancy.

The logical positivists felt it was their duty, in defending philosophy, to find some way of eliminating these speculative flights of fancy on behalf of a more scientific understanding of the discipline. Hence the

"positivism" of logical positivism. By positivism we mean a belief in positive knowledge, or science. We might think of it, then, as an embrace of the scientific method and scientific knowledge over and against metaphysical speculation.

The Revolution in Symbolic Logic

The second phenomenon, equally important, was the culmination of a revolution in symbolic logic that had begun in the nineteenth century with the work of Cantor and Boole, and really took off with the work of Frege and the foundational mathematical researches of Bertrand Russell and Alfred North Whitehead in the *Principia Mathematica*.

What this revolution had done was remarkable. Beginning in the nineteenth century, there was an attempt to make logic every bit as formulaic and rationally demonstrative as mathematics. What resulted was the development of an incredibly rich symbolic system. It was Boole who first developed the truth-functional calculus — the binomial logic whose ultimate fruit takes the form of our computing today. By the early twentieth century, a first-order and second-order logic had been developed such that one could prove, within the grammatical and syntactic rules of those systems, that they were both consistent and complete. This meant that everything true in those languages of first- and second-order logic could be proven, and everything that was proven in those languages must be true — and both of those claims, consistency and completeness, were in fact provable within the language itself.

So by the time one arrived at the early twentieth century, figures like Russell and Whitehead no longer wanted merely to construct a logic as rigorous as mathematics, because logic was already far more syntactically and grammatically rigorous than mathematics. Instead, the project became one of reducing mathematics to pure logic — of recursively building all of mathematics from a small number of

logical rules. Indeed, one could begin by recursively building all of symbolic logic from just two operators: knowing how to use the word *and* and the word *not*, one could build the rest of symbolic logic, and from that, ideally, build all of mathematics. And this was the "logical" part of logical positivism. The positivists deployed this symbolic logic and used it to analyze traditional linguistic usages.

The Text: Ayer's Language, Truth, and Logic

The text we are going to be examining is A.J. Ayer's *Language, Truth, and Logic*, a positivist manifesto — a manifesto of the doctrines shared by the famed Vienna Circle, whose prominent figures included Otto Neurath, Moritz Schlick, and, of course, Rudolf Carnap. The philosophical lineage of this movement was, at least according to Ayer, drawn from such previous empirical analysts as Berkeley and Hume.

The text is, by Ayer's own admission, a young man's book, and it is full of bluff and bluster. It is a very pugnacious text, powerful in its presentation as a straightforward frontal assault on traditional philosophy and metaphysics. What I want to do in this lecture is try to capture some of that quality rather than simply offer a dry rational reconstruction. That means we begin where Ayer begins, with a remarkable chapter titled "The Elimination of Metaphysics."

The Elimination of Metaphysics

The Verifiability Criterion

This is a very bold claim — that one is going to literally eliminate metaphysics. Ayer achieves this goal by analyzing the form of metaphysical sentences and then demonstrating that they violate the criteria of literal significance. In this sense, they will be shown to be

literally nonsensical. What Ayer wants to show us is that metaphysical sentences fail to express propositions — the bearers of truth and falsehood.

Part of this rests on the assumption that all propositions can be divided into one of two classes: they are either factual (what Kant called *synthetic*), or they are tautological (*analytic*). Let us look at the argument Ayer offers.

Metaphysical sentences purport to give us a sort of extra-scientific knowledge of the world. To do so, they must fulfill the criteria of verifiability for factual statements if they are to be meaningful. That criteria is not unlike what we encountered in the pragmatists: would any observation be relevant to the determination of a sentence's truth or falsehood? We might express this more formally by saying that a sentence is a factual proposition if and only if there exists a set of premises and an experiential proposition such that those premises together with that experiential proposition entail the factual proposition in question.

One might take, for example, an existential proposition of the form "I have an object and will release it," together with the laws of gravity as additional premises. Those together should allow us to deduce the fact that once I release that object, it will accelerate downward at a given rate. The factual proposition that if I release this book it will accelerate downward at a particular rate does indeed fulfill this criterion. This is a very formal way of stating the straightforward fact that factual propositions are empirical hypotheses which provide a rule of prediction for experience.

Note that when we say such propositions afford a rule of prediction as a form of verification, this is a very weak kind of verification. It certainly does not prove the truth of a proposition, but it does at least give us grounds to suspect that the proposition bears meaning.

Metaphysical Sentences as Literal Nonsense

We must then ask the same question of metaphysical propositions. Take a typical metaphysical sentence: "The sensible world is merely a realm of appearance." What experience could possibly bear on the truth or falsehood of that sentence? If the sensible world is, in fact, a veil of appearances, that would not affect our experiences one way or the other — we would still see the same things we do. We are therefore compelled to ask: what is the factual content of saying that the sensible world is merely a realm of appearance? And the answer is that there is no factual content to it whatsoever. Hence Ayer's conclusion that it is literal nonsense.

The same could be said for the philosophical dispute between monism and pluralism. What particular implication would either position have for our experience? To say that the world is ultimately one, or that the world is many — all of our experiences would remain the same in either case. Such a sentence tells us nothing of the world that we did not already know. It is, in Ayer's phrase, a noise signifying nothing. Metaphysical sentences are linguistic expressions without any cognitive content: they are neither true nor false, but rather literal nonsense.

We might therefore define a metaphysical sentence as a sentence that purports to express a proposition and is neither a tautology (a logical truth) nor an empirical hypothesis (a factual or synthetic statement).

The Grammatical Origins of Metaphysics

Ayer argues that the origins of metaphysics lie in a superstitious interpretation of grammar. Take, for example, the term "substance." Our notion of substance arises from the grammatical form of subject and predicate, which leads us to believe that every noun corresponds to an entity that is prior to its sensible properties or accidents. We might think of a coffee mug: it has a series of accidents or properties

— smooth texture, a color, perhaps an odor. And because we have a noun that refers to the coffee mug, we assume there must be some *substance*, coffee mug, which bears those properties. But as logical analysis shows, the thing "coffee mug" is simply defined as the sum of its properties. This was exactly the insight Berkeley had demonstrated: physical objects are simply a conjunction of the experiences we have of them. In this sense, properties do not hang on the thing — they hang on each other. What unifies the coffee mug is the fact that all of the central experiences we have of it are constantly conjoined. For that reason, we can eliminate substance as a superstition based on grammar.

Similarly, Ayer argues that our notion of being arises — in English as in classical Greek — because in both languages, attributive and predicative sentences have the exact same grammatical form as existential ones. Consider the sentences "Martyrs exist" and "Martyrs suffer." This leads us to assume that since suffering is a property, and since existence can serve the same grammatical function as suffering, existence must also be a property. Or again: "Peas exist" alongside "Peas are green" leads us to assume that existence is a property of things, just as greenness is a property of peas. But as Kant had pointed out, existence is not an attribute or a property. It is a claim about the reality or truth of a sentence involving the usage of that term. This grammatical confusion leads to the needless replication of ontological entities — what Ayer calls an ontological slum.

Consider another sentence: "Unicorns are fictitious." This gives rise to a whole host of what Ayer considers dopey modal considerations about the way our language works in naming. We are tempted to assume that for the sentence "Unicorns are fictitious" to mean something, unicorns must in some sense exist in order to have the property of being fictitious. But fictitiousness, Ayer points out, is not a predicate — it is a denial of existence. If translated into symbolic

logic, the sentence would not state "there exists something that is both a unicorn and is fictitious." It would instead say: "For anything you find, it will not be a unicorn." Here we see the power of symbolic logic in allowing us to eliminate confusions arising from the grammatical rules of natural language. When philosophers assume that every grammatical subject must refer to something, and find that entities like unicorns do not fit into our world of experience, they create another world to house them — and that is the realm of metaphysics.

The Proper Function of Philosophy

For Ayer, the function of philosophy is critical, not speculative. It is not to create a metaphysical slum, but to help us criticize and come to understand the nature of linguistic usage. In this sense, philosophy is not really a science and therefore does not offer us knowledge about the world. Its proper task is to analyze various problems and issues, and above all to clarify our linguistic usages through analysis.

Consider the problem of induction: how are we able to prove logically that, on the basis of experience, we can predict that the future will resemble the present and past? Ayer's point is that there is no solution to the problem of induction. You can only deduce a principle of induction from either an empirical or a formal principle. If you take a formal, tautological principle, then you are guilty of deducing an existential proposition from a tautology, which is logically impossible. But if you start with an empirical proposition, then you have already assumed the very problem you are trying to prove — namely, that nature is uniform in time and space, which presupposes the resemblance of future to present, which is precisely the issue at stake in induction. For Ayer, then, induction cannot be

deduced, and therefore it is not a real problem at all, but a pseudo-problem — because every real problem at least allows us, in principle, to search for a viable solution. Induction's validity cannot and need not be proven. It is based instead on its results: we believe in induction because when we practice it, we get results that help us work our way through the world. That is a pragmatic justification, not a philosophical one.

The Forerunners of Logical Positivism

Ayer believes that logical positivism is in fact the culmination of a series of movements across the earlier history of philosophy. He mentions Locke on the problem of knowledge and the development of a Lockean phenomenology, Berkeley on defining things by their sense contents, and above all Hume — probably more than any other thinker — on the analysis of causality and knowledge. Lesser analysts in this tradition might include Hobbes, Bentham, Mill, and even Plato, Aristotle, and Kant, because all of them employed the same method of philosophical discussion — analysis.

His point is that the analyst is concerned with the way we speak of things, not with the things themselves. Thus the philosopher speaks of language, not the world, and does so by means of definitions. That sort of philosophy is a department not of science but of logic.

Philosophic Analysis and Definitions

The nature of philosophic analysis is to offer definitions for terms. Unlike the lexicographer who writes a dictionary definition, the philosopher does not give explicit definitions based on synonymy, but rather definitions in use. Such definitions will translate a symbol into equivalent sentences which contain neither the symbol nor any

of its synonyms. For example, sentences with material bodies as their points of reference will be translated into sentences that refer only to sense contents; sentences about numbers might be reduced to sentences referring only to sets or classes.

The best example of this is Bertrand Russell's theory of definite descriptions, which deals with sentences of the form "the so-and-so" and translates them into sentences without that expression. There is a famous conundrum here: take the sentence "The present King of France is bald." That sentence clearly seems to have a meaning, and therefore people are tempted to assume that in some sense there must be something to which "the present King of France" refers — it must name a present king. Since there is no present King of France, he must be a possible present king of France. However, Russell's theory shows us how to define such definite descriptions in use and thereby eliminate them. We would translate that sentence as: there exists some thing such that that thing is a king of France, is bald, and is unique. Translated in this way, we have no hesitation in saying that the sentence is simply false.

Analytic and Synthetic Propositions

Ayer claims that all literally meaningful sentences express propositions, and these propositions are the sole bearers of truth values. Such propositions are either analytic (tautological) or synthetic (factual).

Analytic propositions are those raised for us by the problem of mathematics and logic. Ayer believes these truths are absolutely necessary, but they are necessary almost by fiat — we hold them to be true because of the conventional rules we have about the way such propositions are used and expressed. They are true by virtue of the syntactic and grammatical rules used to form them. Thus the

truths of logic and mathematics are analytic, tautological, and therefore true by virtue of definitions. We might define an analytic proposition as one whose validity depends solely on the definitions of the symbols it contains. To give two intuitive examples: the statement "It is either raining or it is not raining" is true on the basis of how we understand the truth value of the word *or* — it exhausts all possibilities, but tells us nothing about the world. Similarly, "2 + 2 = 4" does not depend on what the word *2* or *4* refers to in the world, but on our understanding of the operator *plus*, the relation of equality, and how we define 2 and 2 relative to 4. Analytic propositions have no factual content and tell us only how we use symbols according to our semantic and syntactic conventions.

Synthetic propositions, on the other hand, are empirical hypotheses. Unlike tautologies, we can never have certain knowledge of them. We test their validity by seeing whether they enable us to anticipate or predict experience. Successful prediction increases the probability of such a proposition, and failure to predict successfully obviously undermines its truth. There is therefore no absolute rationality by which we could build foolproof empirical hypotheses. Our grounds for synthetic or factual beliefs are, in this sense, purely pragmatic.

Ethics: The Emotivist Theory

We have now delimited the range of literally significant sentences: they are either analytic propositions or synthetic propositions. We can now turn to the analysis of traditional philosophical fields — ethics and theology — in light of this distinction.

Ethical statements can be broken into four classes. The first class contains definitions of ethical terms; such analytical propositions comprise legitimate ethical philosophy proper — questions like: what do we mean by "good"? What do we mean by "virtuous"? What do

we mean by "moral"? The second class contains descriptions of moral phenomena and their causes; these synthetic propositions comprise in part the social and human sciences — economics, sociology, anthropology, and psychology. The third class consists of exhortations to virtue; these are not propositions at all, but commands or ejaculations intended to prompt behavior: "Do the right thing," "One ought always to tell the truth." The fourth class contains ethical judgments about what is right and wrong.

Such statements express neither analytic nor synthetic propositions. Normative ethical terms are not reducible to factual terms, but are rather absolute or intrinsic — and that is because they are really pseudo-concepts, and are in fact literally meaningless. The function of ethical judgment is, for Ayer, *emotive*: such terms evince, rather than assert, our feelings. Take the sentence "I was wrong to belittle metaphysics." Ayer translates this as follows: the only factual content is the statement "I have belittled metaphysics." The additional expression "I was wrong" adds nothing beyond the declaration of a feeling — it is as if one said "I belittled metaphysics!" with a tone of dismay. If we take it further and make it a universal judgment — "It is wrong to belittle metaphysics" — that practically amounts to saying "Belittling metaphysics, how could you?" This expresses one's emotions but gives us no factual content about the world beyond the fact that you do not like to see metaphysics belittled.

Real moral disputes that have philosophical traction are therefore always about questions of fact. Disputes about ultimate values are pseudo-disputes, precisely because they are in principle unresolvable. You think belittling metaphysics is bad; someone else thinks it is good. How are we possibly to settle that dispute? In this sense, ethical disputes have the same status as aesthetic ones: you like Juan Gris, someone else likes Picasso — there is no standard of

judgment, only a question of individual proclivity. It is impossible to prove the truth of either moral choice.

Theology

Just as it is impossible to prove the truth of competing moral choices, it is impossible in another domain — theology — to prove demonstratively that God exists, one of the great projects of Western metaphysics. Why can't we prove that God exists? Empirical propositions are uncertain, so they cannot produce a demonstratively certain proof. But *a priori* propositions are certain, though they are tautologies — and from a tautology, one can only deduce another tautology. So the existence of God cannot be demonstrably proven from an empirical proposition, nor can it be generated from tautologies.

Even more to the point, Ayer wants to show us that the word "God" has no meaning in use. When we talk of God, we refer either to everything — the principle that informs all being — which is as good as referring to nothing, since a term that does not discriminate does not actually refer in any powerful way, or we wind up talking about nothing at all. That is because "God" is not a genuine proper name. For Ayer, talk of God says nothing about the world or about the structure of language, and is therefore neither true nor false. It is simply, in a strict philosophical sense, nonsensical.

Philosophy as the Handmaid of Science

Where, then, does this leave our understanding of philosophy, having eliminated both metaphysics and God? I would argue that in Ayer's conception, philosophy has in a certain sense come full circle since its re-emergence in the thought of Aquinas. Recall that Aquinas

had argued that philosophy is the handmaid of the queen of the sciences — theology. For Ayer, philosophy, and logical positivism in particular, is the handmaid of *science*. As Ayer himself writes:

"*One has only to consider the importance to contemporary physics of Einstein's definition of simultaneity in order to realize how necessary it is for the experimental physicist to be furnished with clear and definitive analyses of the concepts which he employs. And the need for such analyses is even greater in the less advanced sciences. For example, the failure of psychologists at the present time to emancipate themselves from metaphysics and to coordinate their inquiries is principally due to the use of symbols such as 'intelligence,' or 'empathy,' or 'subconscious self,' which are not precisely defined. The theories of psychoanalysts are particularly full of metaphysical elements, which a philosophical elucidation of their symbols would remove. It would be the philosopher's business to make clear what was the real empirical content of the propositions of psychoanalysts, and what was their logical relationship to the propositions of behaviourists, or gestalt psychologists — a relationship at present obscured by unanalyzed differences of terminology.*"

This also has implications running in the other direction: science gives philosophy its project and its tasks. As Ayer writes, "if science may be said to be blind without philosophy, it is true also that philosophy is virtually empty without science." Science gives to philosophy a series of problems to deliberate on — a body of factual propositions whose linguistic usage it can help clarify and make precise. This is critical because, for Ayer, science is essentially a self-conscious common sense, a systematic form of factual knowledge.

The philosopher, then, according to Ayer, emerges as a kind of critic whose job it is to scrutinize our linguistic usage and ensure that our expressions are referential and semantically meaningful. And in this sense, as I have suggested, Ayer has turned philosophy full circle.

From being the handmaid of theology — the queen of the sciences in the Thomistic medieval hierarchy — it has now become the handmaid of science. Philosophy now exists to provide rational charter to our scientific heritage, culture, and values.

Lecture 66: Max Weber and Legitimate Authority

Professor Darren Staloff

Introduction: Weber as the Architect of Modern Sociology

Max Weber was, in many ways, the principal architect of modern sociology. To this day he remains one of the principal sources of sociological theory and speculation. Like Marx and Engels, he had attempted to create a social science — a science of society that would help explain historical change. But there were some important differences between his work and what we found in our earlier discussion of historical materialism.

Marx's historical materialism was informed by an attempt to create Newtonian-type laws of development. Weber, far more deeply affected by the Darwinian Revolution, sought instead to understand society through taxonomic schemes — through classification — the same sort of methodology we would find in biology. It was such taxonomic schemes that allowed Weber to engage in what we would call cross-historical analysis: to apply types and models to a wide variety of different historical, cultural, and social circumstances.

Another difference between Weber and Marx was that Marx was concerned primarily with economic structure, which was really central to his thinking. Weber was interested in the economy as well — the text we examine today, *Economy and Society*, announces that in its very title — but Weber saw the economy and economic influence as one species of a larger genus, and that genus was power. Weber was interested in power in all its manifestations.

A further difference between them is that Weber sought a value-neutral analysis of society, whereas Marx had insisted on a very close

relationship between theory and practice, arguing that one's philosophy ought to help us change the world. Weber feared that sociology had in fact become a kind of handmaid of partisan politics and ideological struggle, and so he sought a sociology that would be scientific and independent of one's political perspectives. This is not to suggest that Weber had no political convictions — he did, and we would describe them as quite passionately liberal. But he always saw them as separable from his sociological work, his work as a theorist of society.

Power and Authority

What we are going to examine in this lecture is Weber's analysis of a particular kind of power. We might define power as the ability to act, or the ability to force others to act. Within that broader range of phenomena we might call power, there is a smaller and more specific kind of power that Weber called *Herrschaft*, which is sometimes translated as "legitimate domination," though I think it is more intuitively understood as *authority*.

What characterizes authority is not only that one has the power to force action, but that such power is recognized as legitimate by those who are subject to it. Authority, then, is that situation in which the commands of an authority are recognized by those subject to it as both legitimate and therefore, in some sense, morally binding. Weber in fact defines domination as the probability that certain specific commands, or all commands, will be obeyed by a given group of persons.

What we will do in this lecture is first look at what Weber means by legitimate domination or authority, and what is entailed in the analysis of it. Weber argues that in all of human history, we find exactly three forms of authority or legitimate domination. We will

then spend time looking at each of those three forms in turn: first, legal or bureaucratic authority; then traditional or patriarchal-patrimonial authority; and finally, charismatic authority.

The General Structure of Legitimate Domination

There are a variety of different ways of supporting authority or legitimate domination — custom, personal material interest, and even a desire for solidarity all help sustain it. But ultimately, the only thing that is sufficient to support authority is the belief in the legitimacy of that given form of authority and of the persons who are empowered within it.

Authority or legitimate domination essentially involves rule over a considerable number of persons and therefore requires a staff. It is ultimately a three-place relation: on the one hand a ruler, on the other hand his or her staff, and finally the subjects — those subject to that authority. As the type of authority varies, so does the kind of administrative staff, the type of obedience, and the mode of exercising authority. Types of domination are therefore classified according to their claim to legitimacy, and those claims to legitimacy rest on three different grounds.

The first are rational grounds, associated with bureaucratic authority. These rest on the belief in the legality of enacted rules and the right of those elevated to authority under such rules to issue commands — and this, Weber calls the essence of legal authority. The second ground is tradition. Traditional grounds of authority rest on the belief in the sanctity of immemorial traditions and the legitimacy of those exercising authority under them by virtue of their traditional place in a social, political, or institutional hierarchy. And finally, there are charismatic grounds for authority. Charismatic authority rests ultimately on devotion to either the exceptional sanctity, heroism, or

exemplary character of an individual, and to the normative patterns or order revealed by that individual.

It is important to note that these three forms are archetypes — pure models. They are not always found in their pure form in the real world. It is also important to note that they are not mutually exclusive: they can be found across all kinds of organizations and institutions, including the family, private social clubs, political parties, institutions of the state, legal courts, and military organizations, and we will often encounter them in mixed combinations.

Legal-Bureaucratic Authority

Legal authority has as its staff a bureaucratic administration, and this is the pure type of legal domination. Let us look at this pure archetype of legal-bureaucratic authority.

This pure type rests on essentially five basic beliefs. First, any legal norm can be established by agreement or imposition on the basis of expediency or morality, and at least the members of the organization — that is, the bureaucratic staff — must obey. Second, every body of law is conceived to be a consistent system of abstract rules which have been intentionally and formally created to be consistent. Third, even officials within the staff are subject to those universal legal norms — no one is above the law, as it were. Fourth, a person who obeys authority does so as a member of the organization, and what is obeyed is not a superior, but the law. And fifth, members of bureaucratic organizations obey superiors solely as placeholders in an impersonal order — obedience is based not on personal loyalties, but on a clear hierarchical chain of command and one's position within it.

Such authority is characterized by continuous rule-bound conduct — there are always rules laid out that establish procedures — and by

specified spheres of conduct, so that each bureaucratic official knows exactly what domain his authority ranges over. As already mentioned, there is a hierarchic officialdom, so that everyone knows exactly where they stand in the organizational chart. There is specialized training for officials, since different positions require different technical expertise. Particularly in private organizations, there is a sharp disjuncture between the staff and the ownership, with the implication that the staff will be compensated by salaries — and this is what creates a career orientation among the bureaucratic staff. Finally, and critically, all orders must be written, so that they can be universal, impersonal, and rational.

Weber believed that such pure bureaucratic administration was what he called *monocratic* — meaning that it follows essentially one rule — and in his view it was in fact the most technically efficient and therefore the most formally rational means of exercising authority over people. It is a species of domination through knowledge. We find this pure type of authority across a wide variety of institutions: most corporations from the CEO on down are bureaucratic institutions with clear chains of command, written procedures and rules, career orientation, and requirements for technical training. So are most hospitals, run by administrators with clear rules governing admission, discharge, and treatment procedures. Schools are largely run bureaucratically, based on written rules and curricula. Most clergy in Christian churches belong to bureaucratic organizations and must undergo technical training to qualify for the positions they hold. Political parties in contemporary America — both the RNC and the DNC — are bureaucratic organizations with clear hierarchies of command and procedural rules, in which staff members build careers through technical expertise. Even modern armies have become, in large part, bureaucratic organizations, as reflected by the role of staff sergeants at the lower levels, chief of staff at the higher levels, and the ubiquitous presence of staff officers throughout.

Consequences of Bureaucratic Authority

Weber argues that bureaucratic domination tends to produce three distinct social consequences. The first is a tendency within the bureaucracy to promote what he called social leveling — a leveling in favor of technical competence. This means that one's social status prior to entry into the bureaucratic structure is in fact irrelevant to one's career prospects within it. As long as one has the technical training and expertise to do the job, social background presents very little impediment to career advancement. This was critically important in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when both Europe and America were ethnically and racially divided societies in which class differences had been profoundly important in determining social privilege. Bureaucracy tended to undermine that: any ethnicity, any race, could find a position in civil service if it had the technical training and competence necessary to fulfill its office.

The second consequence, and one that Weber found troubling, was a tendency toward plutocracy on behalf of bureaucratic officialdom — specifically through the elongation of the technical training required for bureaucratic positions. Weber had a fairly clear insight into how this worked: by increasing the amount of technical training required to hold a certain civil service position, one effectively enclosed it to a smaller and smaller number of applicants and thereby made it more prestigious. Beyond that, Weber recognized that a great deal of university study is simply a perquisite for those who can afford it — and the more university training that could be demanded for a bureaucratic position, the more that requirement would serve as a privilege available primarily to the already-advantaged.

The third consequence is what Weber believed to be the emergence of a cold, formalistic spirit of impersonality. None of us have any difficulty recognizing this from our encounters with bureaucracies,

but Weber was genuinely concerned about it, believing that over time bureaucracies would tend to become less and less human in their responses to and interactions with society as a whole.

Traditional Authority

Let us now turn to the second mode of authority: traditional authority. In this case, the ruler is not a superior in a chain of command, but rather a personal master. The staff is made up not of specially trained officials, but of personal retainers who are ruled as either comrades or subjects, but never as members of an organization. It is personal loyalty that binds the staff to the master. And obedience is not owed to some set of abstract rules, laws, or written procedures, but to a person who holds a position of authority by virtue of tradition. An inherited monarch surrounded by aristocratic retainers offers a clear example.

This form of authority actually limits the actions of the master, precisely because the master's own actions are bound by tradition, and his power must be exercised with an awareness of such constraints, lest he foment what are known as traditionalist revolutions. If a traditional ruler attempts to introduce reforms and innovate in administration, he is likely to spark a revolution mounted in the name of tradition itself. This is exactly what we see at the onset of the English Civil War, when Parliament claimed to be standing for traditional liberties — fighting against the king in order to defend the monarchy against the innovations of his ministry. A similar argument might have been proffered by the French aristocrats involved in the Fronde at roughly the same time.

In such a system, the creation of law by legislation is entirely out of place — it is not even a conceivable option, for only the good old ways bear legitimacy. One might think here of the famous

seventeenth-century English fascination with the common law and the ancient constitution — the notion that the origin of all legal and constitutional norms lay beyond memory, and that those who created innovations were guilty of destroying that foundation.

The Staff of Traditional Authority

The staff of the ruler under traditional authority is recruited either patrimonially or extra-patrimonially. Patrimonial recruitment draws from persons who owe the chief traditional ties of loyalty — kinsmen, family relations, slaves, household officials, or retainers. The Sultan of Egypt used his physician; the leaders of Ottoman Turkey often used eunuchs. It might also include clients or freedmen; Roman emperors, for example, very often used slaves or recent freedmen as their chief counselors, since such men owed their social position — their very liberty — directly to a personal master. Extra-patrimonial recruitment, by contrast, would include personal favorites, vassals, or freemen who voluntarily chose to become officials. One might think of a king who takes a court favorite as his prime counselor — such was the relationship between James I and Charles I and George Villiers, who became the Duke of Buckingham. It is this last group, freemen who voluntarily choose to become officials, who often become the source of the growth of bureaucracy and rational administration.

In traditional rule, in contrast to bureaucratic rule, jurisdictions often overlap, and it is the master or lord who adjudicates such conflicts. This actually works to the traditional authority's benefit: if two officials are placed in charge of the same project and one performs better than the other, the more favorable result is embraced by the traditional authority as reflecting his goals. In such a system, rational or technical training for the staff is simply out of the question.

We might think of gerontocracy, or primary patriarchy — the rule of elder males within the family — as forms of traditional authority

without a personal staff. Another example is estate domination, where patrimonial domination is exercised over a staff which has appropriated particular powers and assets, with the result that the lord's discretion in choosing staff is limited: staff members appropriate positions, their incomes, the material means of administration, and governing power itself. The feudal knight is a prime example, since he supplied his own armor and troops and typically demanded not only a benefice but a fief.

Patrimonial retainers receive support from roughly five possible sources: from the lord's table, living with him in his castle; from allowances taken from the lord's magazine or warehouse of goods; from service land, as was the case with boyars and Eastern European nobility; from the appropriation of taxes, fees, or property income; and finally from a fief — service land that becomes inheritable and therefore the basis of private property. The second through fourth forms are all benefices, and when a staff is supported by benefices it is described as prebendal. The fief itself is the rarest form and is, in fact, unique to feudal Western and Northwestern Europe and Japan.

Consequences of Traditional Authority

The consequence of traditional authority that Weber found most important was its tendency to reinforce traditional attitudes — specifically toward economic action. We might think of this as a kind of *noblesse oblige* that undermines formal rationality and thereby inhibits the development of capitalism.

Charismatic Authority

Let us turn now to the third and final form of authority: charismatic authority. Pure charismatic authorities are usually accorded superhuman, supernatural, or at least exceptional powers and qualities. We might think of shamans and prophets claiming magical

powers in primitive conditions; of berserker warrior heroes like Achilles in the *Iliad* in military contexts; and in our own day, of certain political demagogues who appear to their followers as superhuman, extraordinary, and beyond worldly. Those subject to charismatic authority are duty-bound to recognize its authenticity and respond with complete personal devotion to its possessor. The origin of the very phrase "charisma" as a source of authority referred to Jesus and his apostles, who clearly possessed religious charisma and who, at least in their own eyes, wielded supernatural powers.

An organized group subject to charismatic authority is called a charismatic community, and it is the very antithesis of a traditional staff. The prophet has his disciples, the warlord has his bodyguards, the leader has his agents. Such figures are never appointed, promoted, fired, or recruited in any formal sense, nor do they really have careers. Rather, they respond to a call by the leader on the basis of his charismatic qualifications and their own. Jesus sees Simon and says: "Simon, come with me — I will make you a fisher of men." He perceives in Simon a certain charisma, a certain religious intensity. Simon, who will become Peter, recognizes that in Jesus and follows him.

Within such a community — like the community of the apostles — there is no hierarchy. It lives in communistic relations with the leader and with one another. According to the Acts of the Apostles, the apostolic community lived by the credo that Marx would embrace for communism: from each according to their ability, to each according to their needs. The means of such a community are supplied by voluntary gift, by booty, or by anything that is extra-rational in character — and this is necessary to highlight the otherworldly nature of charismatic authority, which is not supported by the rational or traditional means of regular labor.

Charismatic authorities are constantly making new judgments on a case-by-case basis, and such judgments are considered either divine revelations or divine judgments. Charismatic figures, crucially, always demand or preach new obligations. They are the force of change in traditional epochs. The recognition of their values and judgments is a duty for those who feel themselves to be charismatically qualified. As Jesus says: "You have heard it said that... but I say unto you..."

Charismatic authority opposes both rational and traditional authority. With regard to traditional authority, it rejects the normative appeal to the past, and in that sense it is genuinely revolutionary in traditional epochs — in fact, it is the revolutionary force in traditional epochs. It also opposes traditional or rational economizing and rejects any regular form of income or employment, because it is otherworldly.

The Routinization of Charisma

The problem with charismatic authority is that it is by nature inherently unstable and tends to become either traditionalized or rationalized, or both. This is a result of the followers' ideal or material interests in the movement, and it typically occurs following the death of the leader. Such routinization of the charismatic legacy takes one of basically six different forms.

One form involves the search for a new charismatic figure possessing the required qualities — as is done, for example, in the selection of the Dalai Lama, where a variety of children are interviewed and asked to make certain choices, and the child who makes the correct choices is deemed to possess the qualifications for that charismatic position. A second form involves revelation of the legitimate charismatic authorities by means of oracles, lots, or various tests of chance. A third form occurs when the old leader himself chooses a successor — this is exactly what Muhammad did in designating the caliph to follow him. A fourth form is the designation of a new charismatic

authority by a charismatically qualified staff, with recognition by the community, which may require unanimity.

A fifth form is hereditary charisma. Primogeniture in medieval Europe, for example, rested on the assumption that since knights were warrior aristocrats — essentially berserkers — the notion was that primogeniture would ensure that charisma passed within the family. And the sixth and most fully routinized form is office charisma, where it is the office itself that holds the charisma. Once one is initiated into that office and hands are laid upon the official, one takes on the charisma of the office simply by entering it.

Charisma and Democratic Legitimacy

I want to conclude with one final thought from Weber: charismatic authority can be transformed in a democratic direction. In such circumstances, public recognition is not the result of legitimacy but rather its basis. We might think of this as democratic legitimacy — the notion of a ruler whose charisma derives from the people themselves rather than from any inherited tradition or supernatural endowment.

Lecture 67: Husserl and Phenomenology

Professor Robert Solomon

Introduction: Husserl's Background and Formation

Edmund Husserl was a German-Czech philosopher, born in Moravia. He began in mathematics, and everything one says about him should keep in mind that his primary love and his primary interest was always mathematics. He came to philosophy by way of an interest in the philosophy of arithmetic — or what we would call the foundations of arithmetic: what makes an arithmetical formula true?

In philosophy, Husserl became important because he invented a method. That method is called phenomenology, and his intention was to find a foundation for all knowledge. By "foundation" he meant something that was itself unquestionable, absolutely provable, beyond any doubt — something that, in a philosophical sense, consisted of necessary truths. Arithmetic, and mathematics in general, consists of exactly such necessary truths.

Perhaps Husserl was most famous in philosophy for his influence rather than for his philosophy itself, which is fairly technical and directed mainly toward questions that most philosophers have not worried a great deal about. In particular, Heidegger was a student of his, and Heidegger's philosophy has come to dominate a good deal of twentieth-century thought. There is no question that Heidegger at least began and got his start from Husserl's work in phenomenology. Jean-Paul Sartre heard of Husserl at an early age — Husserl gave a famous series of lectures in Paris in the late 1930s — and Sartre, too, began his career as a phenomenologist. His first great philosophical work was quite explicitly a work of phenomenology.

The Path to Phenomenology: From Empiricism to Necessary Truth

Husserl came to phenomenology by a number of different routes, but first and foremost it is important to mention that in his studies of arithmetic he began as a strict empiricist. He followed a German philosopher named Karl Stumpf, but in American terms the philosopher closest to his early views was John Stuart Mill. Mill, a strict empiricist, had argued that mathematics and arithmetic were really a matter of very well-confirmed empirical judgments drawn from our experiences of counting.

Husserl took up this idea and defended it in his first book, but it was very quickly and very badly reviewed by the great German logician Gottlob Frege, who pointed out to Husserl that the idea was simply not plausible — that arithmetic, whatever else it might be, could not be a matter of empirical truth.

Husserl did something which not many philosophers do, certainly not publicly: he changed his mind. He turned around one hundred and fifty degrees and instead decided that arithmetic must be defended on other grounds — and generalizing the idea, he concluded that knowledge in general must be defended on a bedrock of necessary truths which could not be reduced to empirical truth.

What Husserl Opposed: Relativism, Skepticism, Historicism, and Positivism

There is a negative side to his philosophy as well. He opposed a good many trends of his time, and in particular he opposed four positions. The first was relativism — the idea that truth is relative to a time, a place, or a people. Nietzsche was perhaps the most notorious

relativist Husserl would have had in mind, as well as the German philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey. They had argued in various ways that there was a very real question whether knowledge is always perspectival, whether it depends on who you are and how you see things, from what position, and so on. What Husserl wants to say in response is that knowledge, at least at its foundations, must not be perspectival, but must simply be true.

He also objected to skepticism, which had acquired a dominant place in Enlightenment thought — traceable back to the Greeks in one sense, but more proximately to Descartes and his method of doubt, and most famously to David Hume. Skepticism is the view that we cannot know what the world is like, or, even if we allow that we know what the world is like, that we cannot know that we know it.

Husserl also opposed historicism, which one might think of as a special variant of relativism. Historicism is the view that truth and knowledge are relative to a particular historical period or epoch. One might look back to the twelfth century and note that people then thought the earth was flat, and say that this was true for them. Most philosophers would now say this is a poor locution — it might be a way of saying that such a belief was justified on the basis of the evidence they had, or that given their faulty reasoning it was what they believed, but it makes no sense to say it was true for them and not true now. Historicism, the view that truth is relative to time, is something that Husserl will not accept.

Finally, there was positivism, a major movement in the middle of the nineteenth century of which Husserl was certainly very aware, and which is closely akin to the kind of empiricism he had once accepted himself. Positivism, put in its crudest form, says: look at the facts — there are only facts. What Husserl objects to is that from facts you cannot get any notion of necessity, and mathematics in particular, as

Frege had convinced him, could not be based on the facts of the case, however that was construed.

All four of these positions — relativism, skepticism, historicism, and positivism — were, in a broad sense, a kind of naturalism. What they share in common is that they all tried to explain the mind in terms of nature, in terms of science, in terms of causal processes. What Husserl wants to point out is that it is in terms of the mind that nature and our knowledge of nature must be explained. And that requires a notion of certainty, a notion of foundations, a basis on which to build our sense of causality, our sense of the material world, our sense of everything that science and common sense knowledge has to offer.

The Search for Certainty: Descartes, Kant, and the Transcendental Ego

The pursuit of certainty is nothing new in philosophy. It goes back to the Greeks, and Plato is certainly a strong example of it. It goes back to Descartes, who made the pursuit of certainty the hallmark of his system, seeking to find it through his method of doubt: doubt everything until you can prove it beyond a doubt. And it goes back to Kant, who, challenging Hume's skepticism, wanted to find a way of justifying first principles — a way of showing what the rules of the mind, what was necessary for any possible belief to be true, must look like.

This is the Archimedean point that Husserl is looking for: a place where he can rest his thesis, say "this we know for certain," and then build from that to show what else we might know as well. Later in his philosophy, he gives a name to this Archimedean point: it is the transcendental ego. It was in many ways similar to Descartes' notion of subjectivity, and like Descartes it was a method — not a method

of doubt, but nevertheless a method of getting at what was in consciousness, what was in the ego, and using that as a basis.

When Descartes says "I think, therefore I am," this is supposed to be the absolutely necessary first principle from which he can derive everything else he wants to prove. In Husserl it is more complicated — in fact, considerably more complicated — but the idea of a method through which one retreats to consciousness, retreats to the mind, retreats to the self, the ego, really forms the basis of his entire philosophy.

The idea of subjectivity itself is rather complicated. On one hand, subjectivity can refer simply to the first-person standpoint. More generally, it can refer to personal opinions — opinions which have not yet been proven or perhaps cannot be proven — or to one's particular biases, prejudices, and emotional proclivities. In philosophy, subjectivity often refers to a realm: both Descartes and Husserl speak of the realm of consciousness. When Husserl expands this idea into the idea of the transcendental ego, it always carries with it a kind of quasi-spatial metaphor that is, I think, very hard to avoid in common sense talk, and which philosophy can seriously question whether it ought to apply. But in any case, what is clear in Husserl is that looking at the contents of consciousness is the basis of his phenomenology.

He rejects Descartes' method of doubt, yet he maintains something very critical to Descartes: whatever it is we are to prove must be proven on the basis of things which are evident to us. That is phenomenology.

Given vs. Constituted: A Central Tension

There is an important ambiguity running through Husserl's philosophy. One central idea is that truth is given to us through

intuition. The key word here is "given" — to say that something is given is to say that it is not a matter of interpretation, not a matter of construction, certainly not a matter of making it up, but that consciousness here is in some sense passive, receiving rather than creating. The notion of intuition should not be taken as a generic notion of any experience, much less of bare sense data. Rather, it is a very special notion that Husserl shapes from a long tradition in philosophy in which intuitions are opposed to normal experiences — one might trace it back to the concept of *nous* in the Greeks, where Plato used a word sometimes translated as "intellectual intuition," a special kind of knowing.

On the other hand, one might argue that the world is not so much given as constituted by consciousness. The notion of constitution, of course, comes straight from Kant and has a very strong active element: it is not just a question of seeing what the world is like, but of — in different interpretations — setting up the world, framing the world, even creating the world out of one's experience. Some of Kant's more radical followers took precisely that last interpretation, the idea that we create the world through our experience, as essential to their philosophies.

This is far too strong a position for Husserl. The notion of the world as given and the notion of the world as constituted remain in tension throughout his philosophy. The most fruitful way to understand this, I think, is to say it is something of both — and that the distinction as philosophers have normally drawn it since Kant may not be very helpful to begin with.

In any case, the result is going to be necessary and not merely contingent truth. The debate between realism — the view that what we see is the world as it is — and idealism — the idea that what we see is somehow the result of our own ideas — is something that Husserl wants to bypass. He would say that the question itself does

not really make a great deal of sense. Similarly, Kant wanted to say that as a scientist and as a human being he was certainly a realist, but that from a philosophical meta-position he was an idealist, while acknowledging that the question whether the world itself should be construed in terms of realism or idealism would ultimately not make sense.

What Husserl wants to give us is a concept of experience, a concept of the way the world appears to us, a concept of the world as phenomenon, in which he can analyze what the structures — or in Kant's terms, the rules of engagement — might be. How does the world become available to us? How does it take on the structures it has? Whether those structures are given to us or constituted by us is probably an unanswerable question, and Husserl does not try to answer it. Instead, what he tries to do is give us simply a description of the way the world appears.

The Phenomenology of Perception: The Example of the Bowl

Let me give a quick example of how this is supposed to work. Suppose I ask you to look at the bowl on the lectern beside me. There is a sense in which you simply see it, and in that sense you might say the bowl is simply given to your experience through your senses. But if you think for a moment, you do not really see the bowl as such. What you see is the bowl from a perspective. Nietzsche would jump in here and say, of course you only see anything from perspectives, and usually one perspective at a time unless you are a cubist.

But Husserl wants to say that it is not just a question of seeing one perspective at a time. When you see the bowl, you see it not only as the thing in front of you, but as a thing that has, for example, a

backside which you do not see. It would simply be false to say that what you perceive is just the bowl from a perspective in which all you see is the front side, because you would be very surprised if you were to walk around and notice that it is just a facade and does not have another side. There is a sense in which when you see something, you are not describing a mere snapshot, but a very complicated set of concepts through which you perceive something that has many sides, something which — although you have not touched it — you presume has a certain texture and a certain weight. All of this is somehow built into the experience itself.

What Husserl wants to do is give an analysis of experience that brings in all of those different factors. What we see is not simply what is given to us in the raw — obviously, when I see the bowl, what I am bringing to it is a whole host of presuppositions and concepts which make my experience of it much richer than what is simply given could possibly account for.

The Phenomenological Reductions

The question then becomes: how does one examine consciousness and experience in this way? The key for Husserl, especially in his early works, is what he calls the phenomenological reduction. The phrase is in a way misleading, because across his works — and even within his early works — he gives us a number of different reductions serving different purposes. I will describe two of them, though in his various writings they are sometimes blended together in different ways.

The first, which he defended in his early years around 1905 to 1910, he calls — after the Greek — an *epoché*. The word means "suspension," and it is popularly characterized as a way of "bracketing." When we perform this phenomenological epoché or

phenomenological reduction, what we do is bracket out the world in an important sense. More accurately, we bracket out causal relations — and more importantly, we bracket out our common sense understanding that what we see is caused by our sense organs being bombarded by stimuli, from which we then infer that there is an object out there. Notice that this is a two-worlds kind of view, in which I infer on the basis of what is happening inside my consciousness what the world outside must be like.

What Husserl says is that the first thing we must do is get rid of all such notions. This is precisely the kind of "mind as a consequence of nature" philosophy that he wants to reject. Rather, if I look at the bowl, what becomes evident to Husserl is that there is a sense in which I see the bowl quite regardless of what is causing it. To put this in a somewhat perverse way: Leibniz and Berkeley, for example, were both clear examples of philosophers who would say that my experience of the bowl is not necessarily about a bowl being out there — my experience of the bowl may be just ideas planted in my head by God, who plants all ideas and is ultimately the arbiter of all our experiences. Or, to be somewhat more reasonable about it, what seems to me to be a bowl might in fact be a hologram, in which case the causal sequence would be very different. Or more absurdly still, I may be hallucinating and only think I see a bowl. And yet there is a sense in which the hallucinated bowl is phenomenologically the same as the bowl that would actually be there. Or if I take a nap and dream about the bowl I have been discussing, there is a sense in which the dreamed bowl will be the same bowl as the one sitting there.

What Husserl is saying, fundamentally, is that it makes no difference to our description of the experience of the bowl whether it is a genuine bowl, a bowl stimulated in consciousness by God, a hallucinated bowl, a holographic bowl, or a dreamed bowl — there is

a sense in which our experiencing of the bowl is the same in each case. So the first reduction, the epoché, basically says: do not pay attention to the reality of the bowl; do not pay attention to the sense in which a material bowl causes you to have certain experiences; just pay attention to the experience itself and simply describe what that is all about.

Later, when Husserl starts talking more about the transcendental ego, he raises to the center of his thesis the notion of what he calls an eidetic reduction. This too reaches back to the Greeks, and to Plato in particular. The Greek word usually translated as "form" or "idea" is *eidos*, and in more modern terminology we might think of it as the essence of things. When we look at our consciousness, having performed the first reduction — so that we are just looking at consciousness and not at the world — we then try to figure out what the essential features of our experience might be. In my experience of the bowl, for example, it is part of my essential experience of it as a material object that it is a thing with a backside, a thing with mass, a thing in space. And all of this is not particular to this one perception of this one bowl, but is essential to any experience of a material object whatsoever.

Husserl has a famous slogan: back to the things themselves. I have always found this exceedingly confusing, especially for students, because there is a sense in which if "things" means something like the bowl, that is exactly what we are not going back to. What he really means is back to the experience itself, back to the basic intuitions, back to the essential structures of those intuitions through which we can understand what knowledge is all about. The idea is to go back to the mind, back to consciousness, back to the recognition that what we know and what we experience must be based on certain kinds of rules, certain kinds of structures — in any case,

certain kinds of essences — which are common to all experience. Phenomenology tries to isolate those essences.

The Later Husserl: The Lebenswelt

Towards the end of his career in the 1930s, Husserl shifted gears somewhat again. I should add that Husserl was shifting gears all the time. Just as he rather heroically changed his mind when his early theory of arithmetic was soundly refuted by Frege, so too he was always revising his philosophy — revising what phenomenology amounted to and revising the methodological procedures he was encouraging. So much so that giving a simple lecture on Husserl is always plagued by the fact that every year or so there would be a somewhat different philosophy to discuss. In any case, around 1930 he took a fairly radical shift, which may have been due in part to the already influential work of his best student, Martin Heidegger.

What Husserl started to see was that the philosophy he had developed, particularly with mathematics as its paradigm, was too limited. The description of a perceptual experience — a perception of a bowl — does not fit very easily with the sorts of things one would talk about when answering the original Husserlian question: what makes an arithmetical formula such as 2+2=4 true? They are obviously going to be very different in nature. As he became more and more concerned with questions like the phenomenology of perception, he started to realize that he was leaving out an enormous amount. It is not enough to see an object in terms of its having a backside, having mass, and so on. There is something that Husserl had barely talked about in most of his career that he now comes to realize is absolutely essential to knowledge: shared experience.

In a sense, of course, this is precisely the sort of thing that relativists and historicists had always talked about — one might even say that it is shared experience that makes something "true for them" — and Husserl was certainly not going to embrace any such thesis in his own philosophy. Nevertheless, the question of how it is that my experiences are shared by other people is one he had never really addressed. Insofar as one weighs towards the "given" side of the Husserlian equation, one might simply say that what is given to me is given to others as well. But there remains a skeptical question: how do I know about the others, and how do I know about their experience? Insofar as one weighs towards the constitutive side, the question becomes even more pressing: how do I know that the way I constitute objects is the way other people constitute objects?

Rather than give in to this kind of skepticism, Husserl confronts it head-on. In one of his best-known books, *Cartesian Meditations*, based on a series of Paris lectures he gave in the late 1920s, he makes quite explicit reference to Descartes, acknowledges how indebted he is to Descartes' basic retreat to subjectivity and to the notion of method, and then takes on the question which Descartes himself did not really confront: how do we know there are other people, and more importantly for his purposes, how do we know that the structures of experience he describes in his own experience are in fact going to be shared by other humans?

In a sense, this is already partly answered by the idea that what one is doing is describing the essential structures of experience — the essences of human experience — because if something is an essence, it is not just an essence for me, it is an essence for anyone. But the nagging question remains: how do you know there are other anyones to have those experiences, and how do you know that they in fact have the same kind of consciousness that you do?

Husserl never completely answers this question, but what he comes to see is that there is a shared background that we all have — a range of presuppositions which cannot themselves count as rules or structures of consciousness, but which nonetheless enter into our concepts of knowledge, and perceptual knowledge in particular, throughout all our experience. He calls this the *Lebenswelt* — the lived world. The idea is, first of all, that knowledge has a dimension which he had not talked about in his earlier work, partly because of the mathematical paradigm with which he began. And in particular, it has to do with human practices and how people participate in their experience and participate together.

This is something less than the kind of pragmatic turn that was happening very soon after — and was already happening in America — in which practices become the central focus of philosophy. And it is certainly not quite where Heidegger is about to take phenomenology, where practices become the very essence of phenomenology itself. But what we can find in Husserl's later work is a kind of recognition that the mathematical paradigm with which he began is not adequate, and that instead what is needed is a broader concept of experience. And that is precisely where his students are going to take us.

Lecture 68: Dewey's Critique of Traditional Philosophy

Professor Darren Stelloff

Introduction: John Dewey and the American Philosophical Tradition

John Dewey was in many ways the almost stereotypical American philosopher — certainly one of the most famous American thinkers of the twentieth century. He is stereotypical in the sense that he was intensely democratic, practical, progressive, optimistic, and almost bursting with activity and new projects of reform. There is an almost boisterous energy behind Dewey's work. In addition to his abundant philosophical writings, Dewey wrote on topics as diverse as social criticism, political reform, and pedagogy, all of which had a profound impact on American culture and practice. He is most famous for his instrumentalist version of pragmatism, which is, in a certain sense, the distinctively American philosophy.

I want briefly to talk about what pragmatism was for William James, then about Dewey's contribution to that tradition — specifically in giving it a historical and historicist dimension. We will then turn to the precise nature of Dewey's historical criticism of traditional philosophy. Having achieved that deconstruction, we will turn to Dewey's reconstruction, which was, after all, the title of the text under examination here, *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, and with it the project he calls empiricistic naturalism. Finally, we will consider the impact of empiricistic naturalism on moral and political speculation.

Pragmatism: From Peirce and James to Dewey

As I mentioned in my lecture on James, pragmatism had actually been created by the American logician Charles Sanders Peirce as a theory of meaning, and from that had emerged a larger philosophical movement. That theory of meaning held that the meaning of a statement was the practical results in experience one would expect if that statement were true — these are often referred to as its logical consequences. In philosophy, as we saw with James, this served as a method of dissolving arid metaphysical disputes by testing whether there was in fact any practical difference between the positions of disputants, and whether their assertions had any meaning in the first place.

Associated with this method and theory of meaning was a conception of truth: that sentences are true when they are predictive of experience. Since prediction affords us control over the world, theories are true when they work, or when they help us master our natural, social, and cultural environment. This view was popularized by William James, the celebrated doctor, psychologist, and philosopher, who had popularized the doctrines of Peirce and added a theistic and morally progressive element to them.

While Dewey's instrumentalist pragmatism added some new nomenclature and new terms to that theory, his real importance for the pragmatic movement lies elsewhere. Dewey's most important contribution was to give pragmatism a historical and historicist dimension. There are two reasons why Dewey was the first pragmatist able to do this — to situate pragmatism in a larger historical continuum of philosophical speculation. The first is that, unlike James, he was a trained professional philosopher, and therefore quite aware of the canon. The second, and probably more important, is that prior to becoming a pragmatist, Dewey had been a Hegelian. As a result, we find in Dewey's work a heavy Hegelian

residue, meaning an abiding commitment to historicism and a sense of progress.

Pragmatism as Anti-Philosophy: The Historical Defense

Having said that, Dewey's historical defense of pragmatism is in some sense a rather difficult project. This is because, in a certain way of looking at things, pragmatism is not really a philosophy so much as a kind of anti-philosophy. If we think of traditional philosophy as the classical pursuit of eternal truth and epistemological certainty, as well as a quest for ultimate meaning and being, we see that pragmatism does not fit within that tradition. It offers no metaphysical doctrines and nothing answering the description of a serious theory of truth. In that sense, it is not really a philosophy in that traditional, narrow conception.

So what Dewey tries to do is to show us how we came to practice traditional philosophy, rather than offering reasons either for or against it. He is then able to criticize such doctrines on the basis of their results. Much of Dewey's work therefore takes the form of what we might call a historico-sociological criticism of previous philosophers — an approach we have seen before in figures like Nietzsche and Marx.

The Origins of Philosophy: Desire, Imagination, and Social Function

At the center of Dewey's historical interpretation of philosophy is his conception of its origins. From that account emerges his critique of what he sees as the traditional philosophical fixation with the contemplative, or what he calls the spectatorial, view of knowledge.

For Dewey, the basic stuff of philosophy is desire and imagination. We see it most clearly in poetry, drama, and myth in early civilizations. Over time, these cultural phenomena become consolidated in things like religious doctrines, rituals, and state practices. Philosophy emerges as a discrete form of discourse when, as in Greece, breakthroughs in mathematics and practical knowledge threaten to undermine these customary beliefs — traditional religion, traditional politics. Philosophy's raison d'être was therefore an attempt to place spiritual and moral values on a new, more rational foundation, and to adjust these values to changed social and cultural conditions.

This Dewey sees as the basic project of not only the Sophists, but obviously of Plato and Aristotle as well, and it has, in Dewey's mind at least, remained the primary charge of philosophy. In the best — and he means by this the non-traditional — sense, philosophy's real goal ought to be to show us how things hang together: how our religious rituals relate to our scientific beliefs and our political practices. Philosophy shows how they hang together and, or, how they ought to hang together.

The Spectatorial View of Knowledge: Its Origins in Greek Society

Let us turn to the second part of this historical criticism: the spectatorial view of knowledge. For Dewey, this means interpreting knowledge as a relation between, on the one hand, a passive knowing subject who is set apart from an inert world of objects on the other. In this situation, knowledge occurs when the subject correctly identifies the properties, characteristics, features, and forms of objects and beings in his or her thought. We can see this

conception in Plato and Aristotle, and Dewey wants to explain why it originated.

What Dewey argues is that Greek society was composed of two broad strata. On the one hand, there were the idle aristocrats, who were defined precisely by the fact that they did not labor, did not produce. They lived a life of political participation and aesthetic contemplation. On the other hand, the rest of society was made up of those who produced — laborers, artisans, peasants — whose activities were not contemplative or aesthetic, but purely practical and productive.

Given this dichotomy, Dewey argues quite cogently that Plato and Aristotle were of that former class. Plato himself was the scion of a very wealthy aristocratic family. As such, it was natural for them to see knowledge as contemplative, as reflective of their own historical and social experience. Dewey points out that their spectatorial conception of knowledge is very similar to what we would call aesthetic appreciation. The knower is not unlike a Greek aristocrat admiring a beautiful sculpture, a work of architecture, or even a fine piece of Greek porcelain. Hence their absorption with the unchanging form of things at the expense of the temporal and the malleable. Plato, as we recall, was obsessed with the notion of form and structure, as opposed to the material nature of things, which changed over time. Why? Because what changed was the precinct of the craftsman, of the laborer, who changed things from one form to another. Form and structure were what the idle aristocrat experienced in aesthetic apprehension.

So what Plato and Aristotle's spectatorial theory of knowledge showed was that the realm of the craftsman was secondary, in both a metaphysical and an epistemological sense — since it was, according to Plato, the world of eternal forms and truths that was not only

superior but more real than that of grubby material realities, those associated with mechanics, those that are part of *physis*, or nature.

The Spectatorial View in the Modern Era

This interpretation of the knowledge situation was, Dewey believes, inherited by the medievals and scholastics from the classical era, and it was given a new form in the modern era by René Descartes and his quest for epistemic certainty — a quest which, again, Dewey insists, was made from a spectatorial point of view. For Dewey, this forms the core of contemporary traditional philosophy and has given rise to several unfortunate distinctions and quandaries. Recall that Descartes argued that we are spectators, and that our minds receive ideas from objects that are inert and external to us.

What are the problems that emerge in the modern epoch from the spectatorial view of knowledge? First, there is an unfortunate distinction between a knowing subject on the one hand and the known object on the other. This gives rise to a larger distinction between subject and object as metaphysical categories, which we then project onto the universe at large. The result is a bifurcated world divided between material objects on the one hand and super-sensible or supernatural subjects on the other. Dewey points out that this is almost always an invidious distinction: it draws us away from the lower, the physical, the material, the extended, and toward the higher realm of true being — the unextended, the life of the mind — which is wrapped in an honorific title.

Since true knowledge is purely contemplative, as opposed to practical, there emerges a second distinction: that between theory and practice. Theory is concerned with capital-T Truth, while practice is only interested in grubby results. This means that theory has every right to ignore practice — and in fact theory claims to have no

practical results at all. By contemplating the nature of pure being in itself, theory builds a kind of imaginary world that does not suffer from the defects and maladies of our real, lower, practical experience. This is a sort of aristocratic, aesthetic refuge from common life: we escape the unfortunate realities of our social and political existence by ascending into the higher realm of pure speculation and contemplation. The result is that philosophy becomes painfully abstract and, as most lay people feel, ultimately irrelevant to their immediate and human concerns. Dewey here shares Marx's famous criticism of this disjunction of theory and practice — to quote Marx in his famous Theses on Feuerbach: "The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways. The point, however, is to change it."

The contemplative vision of knowledge also gives rise, especially in the post-Cartesian epoch, to the distinction of mind and matter, as well as a host of other metaphysical dualisms. Dewey's point is that none of these dualisms are fruitful in any practical sense. The distinction between mind and matter does not help us develop neurology, cognitive psychology, behavioral psychology, or any other kind of practical knowledge, nor does it help us understand any sort of moral insight. These distinctions bear no relation to our human situation or practical life. They simply serve to lift us out of nature and onto a higher, more refined plane, where the uncertainties and changes of our world of "becoming" are exchanged for a fixed, transcendent realm of being.

For Dewey, such metaphysical doctrines are either laughable — as in the case of Descartes' solipsistic Ghost in the Machine, in which the question of whether I or anyone else actually exists is treated as a serious philosophical problem — or they are morally repugnant. Here we might think of Leibniz's famous claim that he had metaphysically established that this was the best of all possible

worlds. Leibniz wrote this at the end of the seventeenth century in Germany, when Western Germany had been literally soaked in a century's worth of blood from religious warfare. To say, after the Palatinate had been drenched in the blood of religious disputants, that this is the best of all possible worlds is callous and absurd. Similarly, we might think of Hegel's doctrine that the rational is the real and that the state is the highest form of moral-historical evolution. To assert such a doctrine in the early nineteenth century in support of a reactionary and militaristic Prussian state is, for Dewey, an abnegation of a philosopher's moral responsibility.

The results of traditional philosophy have thus been to divorce inquiry from actual historical conditions and needs. In that sense, it has moved away from its original purpose and its historical source of existence in ancient Greece. By insisting on eternal truths, it has led us to hold onto moral views that were founded in and for a different era. Because we hold truths to be eternal, we do not change our moral conceptions. For example, Hegel and a host of other nineteenth-century thinkers taught that the nation-state was the ultimate form of historical community, and that its demands exhausted our highest moral duties. In the nineteenth century, when nation-states were being forged, this may have been a tenable view. But by the time we reach the twentieth century, it leads nations to support one another's destruction in the First World War with absolutely disastrous results. The Hegelian moral conception of the nation-state simply does not make sense in a world of mustard gas, machine guns, aerial bombing, and tanks. Science has fundamentally changed the world in which we live, but traditional philosophy has been unable to adapt itself or its moral conceptions to that changed world.

The Reconstruction: Empiricistic Naturalism

Having deconstructed the history of philosophy, Dewey goes on to offer a reconstruction — a vision of where philosophy ought to go. While pragmatism as a method and doctrine of meaning implies no particular doctrines, Dewey sketches an overall view of the world that he describes as either naturalistic empiricism or empiricistic naturalism — a phrase that will recur when we look at Willard Van Orman Quine.

What do we mean by empiricistic naturalism? It is empiricistic because it insists that knowledge both begins and ends in experience — that it must be practical and sensual. It is naturalistic because it treats the world as a natural phenomenon. And it does so not out of metaphysical scruple, not because Dewey is some kind of hard-shell atheistic materialist, but rather because that is what the most advanced state of our contemporary knowledge tells us — what we learn from physics, biology, and chemistry. If physics, biology, and chemistry should teach us something different in the future, we will certainly change that point of view.

Epistemological Implications: Organism, Environment, and the Dissolution of Skepticism

Dewey's naturalistic empiricism has profound implications for the traditional concerns of epistemology. He wants to replace the traditional epistemic situation of subject and object with a new naturalistic relation: the relation of organism and environment. As an organism becomes increasingly complex, its relations with its environment become increasingly uncertain and precarious, because as instinct declines as a guide to action, the range of potential actions increases, producing uncertainty and anxiety. For Dewey, what we call thought is therefore a biological response to this natural

stimulus in a particularly complex organism, *Homo sapiens sapiens*. Doubt as to what to do next creates a problem, and thought arises to resolve the problems that emerge from our relations with our natural and social environment. Such thought becomes genuinely intellectual when it actually changes the environment to make it more secure and less precarious.

It is important to note that Dewey conceives of the natural environment as including not only physical problems and realities, but cultural problems as well. That is one of the implications of naturalism: culture is part of nature, not a contrast to it. Philosophy is thus often concerned not only with explaining the nature of being, but with moral and political problems as well. Knowledge is a kind of mutual relation between organism and environment, marked by its fruitfulness.

For all of his naturalism, however, Dewey — like all pragmatists — was an epistemological idealist, in the sense that he held that we construct the objects of our knowledge. Put another way, he does not believe that the world comes pre-packaged into the natural kinds that correspond to our parsing of it in language and concepts. One might think of everyday examples: we all speak of directions — north, south, east, and west — but do we believe that nature without us comes pre-parsed into north, south, east, and west? No. We recognize that those are practical forms we have imposed on experience because they are useful to us. Dewey simply generalizes this to all of our posits. Our immediate experience is always precognitive, and our conceptions are just that — posits that help us resolve the problems of that experience. Our theories of the world and our parsing of it are therefore what he calls instruments or tools for adapting ourselves and our environment. As we develop better tools or concepts, our old ones are dispensed with, and our objects

of knowledge change as our parsings change — from substances to molecules to atoms to subatomic particles.

Dewey's epistemological naturalism also eliminates one of the central problems of traditional philosophy: skepticism, which was the inevitable consequence of the spectatorial view of things. Skepticism arises because we can never tell, as subjects, whether our ideas of the world correspond to or copy the nature of objects independently of us. But epistemological naturalism eliminates skepticism because it eliminates the correspondence theory of truth entirely. Things are true if they work. What is known, as an object of knowledge, is not a copy of the world or a reflection of reality, but a tool or instrument posited by us to help resolve some particular problem or fulfill some purpose or agenda.

Contrary to traditional philosophy, then, there are no eternal or immutable truths. Even for Dewey, the truths of mathematics and logic are instrumental: we believe in them because they have worked for us, they are extremely useful, and they continue to work for us. But it is not inconceivable that we might improve on them someday and embrace new or better ones. We might think, for example, of the change in geometry from the flat plane geometry Euclid proposed to the curved geometry that was developed and that actually seems to model the notion of curved space Einstein proposed.

To summarize this point: contrary to traditional philosophy, for Dewey, epistemological naturalism means that knowledge is not a unique thing, *sui generis*, but is in fact a natural phenomenon — a relation between an organism and its environment.

Moral and Political Implications: Pragmatic Ethics and Democratic Growth

Dewey's epistemological naturalism has equally profound implications for moral and political theorizing. He rejects the traditional quest for ultimate ends — that one true value, whether it be Kantian duty or utilitarian pleasure and happiness. What Dewey wants to do is apply the same experimental reasoning we find in science to ethical problems, which are, in his view, every bit as natural as scientific problems.

How does this work? We begin with the observation that, like all animals, humans are on the one hand creatures of habit or disposition, and on the other, creatures of impulse. We might think of customs as widely spread uniformities of habit. When we all engage in the same habitual disposition to extend a hand to a stranger, that becomes the custom of shaking hands. As societies change, their customs and institutions sometimes cease to serve the human situation due to changes in the environment. As this tension becomes acute, one of two things can happen. The culture can fossilize, as happened in New Kingdom Egypt, or impulse can simply break through the cake of custom blindly, producing violent disruption — a political revolution, for example.

But if guided by intelligence — that reflective and reflexive rationality — impulse can create new habits, new customs, and new institutions. The analogy here would be successful political reforms as opposed to violent revolutions. For Dewey, this is the fundamental task of a pragmatic ethics: to guide intelligent action in pursuit of an end.

While ethics guides action in pursuit of an end, it does not itself determine that end. Dewey argues there are no fixed moral ends. Our ends arise from our culture, from our customs, from our habits, and as a good historicist and a good disciple of Hegel, he knows

they change over time as our needs and circumstances change. The point is not that we cannot identify values — we can identify a wide variety of them. But there is no way of lexically ordering them. You want liberty; another wants justice. There is no way of saying which categorically trumps the other. Nor do these values arise in philosophy — they are not the result of rational speculation but arise from life, from experience. The philosopher, therefore, has no privileged access to these basic and fundamental values.

So instead of trying to reduce all values to one ultimate value, as Kant did, or determining the logical order of their precedence, the philosopher should look at each case as morally unique. He should not expect to find universal solutions. Each moral problem constitutes a domain for speculation geared toward a practical solution. What the philosopher can do is point out what the consequences of a particular value would be in a given situation, and then suggest the means to accomplish that project if it is desired. Ethics in this sense is not so much a deductive science or an *a priori* search for first principles as it is an intensely practical project, very similar to Aristotle's notion of *phronesis* — learning to match means to ends.

Dewey's Democratic and Promethean Vision

Dewey acknowledges that these values and ends are historically contingent. And as a creature of early twentieth-century America, he has his own particular ends, which are, I would argue, extremely progressive and democratic. I call them progressive because, like Nietzsche, Dewey had an almost overweening optimism, a Promethean faith in change and growth — a conviction that evolution, change, and growth were positive and would lead to genuine progress. He shares with Nietzsche the view that it is

individual character, or human nature itself, that is primarily the moral and social object of growth.

For Dewey, a person's character is constituted by his or her habits and dispositions and the interrelation between them. It is important to note that Dewey does not believe human nature is fixed or given. Rather, it needs to be developed, and what develops it is both culture and social environment. Dewey's end is therefore to promote the development of human character — human nature, if you will — by reforming social institutions and customs to promote its maturation, integration, and growth.

In a certain sense, then, Dewey is like Nietzsche in that his moral project is one of self-creation, whereby we try to arrange our world to promote the formation of dynamic, strong, and vital selves. But Dewey is unlike Nietzsche in that he is democratic. He is interested not in the self-creation of a handful of elite *Übermenschen*, but in the self-creation and development of every single member of society, not just the privileged or powerful. This is because the person is always formed by society, and we are always, fundamentally, social animals. The ultimate test of any custom or institution, then, is how it contributes to the growth of all persons in a given society. This kind of Promethean democracy is reminiscent of another Hegelian naturalist, Marx, whose vision of communist humanity also featured a fully developed and rounded humanist character.

Conclusion: Pragmatism as a Counter-Voice in the Philosophical Tradition

To conclude: Dewey's pragmatism, and indeed pragmatism in general, is a combination of peculiarly American attitudes toward democracy, work, progress, and science on the one hand, and a set of philosophical dispositions that constitute a dissenting theme in

the modern philosophical genre on the other. It is the American variant of a counter-voice within the canon of traditional philosophy — a counter-voice that speaks out against the dualisms of subject and object, mind and matter, reason and experience, and most importantly, theory and practice. We might think of this counter-canon as perhaps begun by Francis Bacon, pursued by Marx and Nietzsche at the least, all of whom shared a deep and abiding naturalism that stood in stark contrast to the metaphysical idealism and rationalism of the canonical tradition.

Lecture 69: Heidegger, *Dasein*, and Existence

Professor Robert Solomon

Introduction: Heidegger's Life and Philosophical Background

Martin Heidegger is a twentieth-century German philosopher, and many people would say he is the most important twentieth-century philosopher on the continent. He came into philosophy from theology, and his philosophy from beginning to end always carries a kind of religious sensibility. He studied with Edmund Husserl, and the method of choice was phenomenology. But although he began in phenomenology, even within his first major work Heidegger quickly moved beyond it, and as we will see, he rejects some of the most basic premises of Husserl's philosophy.

In 1933, he joined the Nazi Party. Although he left the party after only a year, he never really repudiated or repented for his involvement in it. Nor did he ever genuinely regret the Nazi movement in general; indeed, in perhaps his strongest statement on the matter, he said only that it failed to live up to its original purpose. His most important book, the one that most people read, is *Being and Time*, published in 1927. It has been branded a part of the existentialist movement, and I think it does in fact deserve to be classified that way — though Heidegger himself rather vehemently rejected the label.

The book itself is about human existence. Unlike his teacher Husserl, who was interested primarily in mathematics and necessary truth, Heidegger was interested instead in what it means to exist, and consequently in the problems of human life. He called what he did ontology, or even fundamental ontology, and he took as the

dominant question in philosophy what he called the question of being. Again, this had a kind of religious dimension, and at various points in his philosophy he talks about a new god, or he talks about the need for a god to save us. In fact, throughout his philosophy there is a kind of passivity in which we are to be saved from something.

The Question of Being: Ontological vs. Ontic

The question of being is the animating concern of *Being and Time*, though very quickly, as we will see, Heidegger moves beyond it and reserves its full treatment for a later work that was, in fact, never completed. What he wants to do is understand something quite different from what philosophers since antiquity have typically asked about: what makes the universe what it is, what its basic substance or ingredient is, or what distinguishes one thing from another. Rather, Heidegger distinguishes sharply between what he calls the question of being on the one hand and the nature of beings or entities on the other. He makes clear that what he is interested in is the ground of being — that which makes entities possible, that through which entities can appear to us as things in the world.

He makes a distinction between *ontic* questions, having to do with particular things and their nature, and *ontological* questions — from the old Greek root — meaning questions about the nature of being as such. But before he can investigate the nature of being as such, he tells us, we first have to examine the being through whom the question of being comes into question, and that is a creature he calls *Dasein*.

Dasein: Neither "Human Nature" nor Mere Consciousness

To put it simply, *Dasein* is each of us. One might say *Dasein* is human being, but this is something that Heidegger would reject, and I think for good reasons. As a phenomenologist, what he is trying to do is find our primordial modes of being in the world — though, as we will see, he would never use the word "experience" — in order to understand exactly how it is that we see and perceive the world. But if we say right from the start, as many eighteenth-century philosophers did, that what we are investigating is human nature or human understanding, we have already begged a number of important questions.

Most importantly, might it not be the case that other creatures — perhaps Martians, or some higher animals — share the structure of our minds in such a way that they see the world as we do, and that the phenomenological truths to be described apply to them as well? Or looking forward to a multicultural perspective, one might ask: how do we know that other people in other cultures in fact share anything like our view of the world? When I describe, in Husserl's terms, the structures of my own experience, could it be that I am really describing something peculiar to me, to my culture, or to people who speak my language, and which does not apply around the world at all? In his later works, Heidegger becomes very keenly aware of the possibility of other ways of experiencing being, other ways of seeing the world, and he is careful not to generalize his own particular perspective.

Heidegger's Anti-Cartesianism

The central philosophical thesis of *Being and Time* and all of Heidegger's subsequent work is directed against one philosopher in

particular. That philosopher is Descartes, and we might say that what Heidegger's philosophy is fundamentally about is a kind of anti-Cartesianism. I said a moment ago that Heidegger would never use a word like "experience," nor would he use words like "consciousness," "mind," or "subjectivity." This is because the central idea of Descartes' philosophy — that the world is split into two substances, mind on the one hand and body on the other, with God as a kind of third substance — is something that makes both philosophy and genuine self-understanding impossible.

When we think about mind and body in Descartes' terms, we seem very quickly stuck with the idea that we are, first of all, our minds. Descartes makes this plain: *I think, therefore I am*. What am I? I am a thinking thing. But there is a sense in which we then find ourselves stuck inside our minds, and there is a very real question — one that plagued Descartes and virtually all the philosophers after him — of how we get outside our minds to know the world in itself. Skeptics like David Hume doubted that we could ever know the world as it really is. Others, like Bishop Berkeley and Leibniz, suggested that what we experience is not so much the world as the ideas in our minds, which God has placed there. So we find ourselves caught inside consciousness, whereas everything Heidegger wants to say is that this notion, this view, is simply absurd.

In place of consciousness and subjectivity, he simply talks about *Dasein*, and *Being and Time* throughout is basically an analysis of *Dasein*. Thinking about Husserl in terms of the essential structures of experience, we might say that what Heidegger is after are the essential structures of *Dasein*, and those essential structures are going to be what make our engagement with the world — again, "experience" is not his term — what it is. When he rejects Husserl's emphasis on consciousness and the ego, he is rejecting the Cartesian tradition. He also rejects what Husserl defends as the

phenomenological reduction, or the *epoché*. Nevertheless, he wants to hold on to the idea that *Dasein* has essential structures and that we can discover what these are.

Being-in-the-World as a Unitary Phenomenon

The first and most important of these structures is this. Whereas Descartes, and later Husserl, write as if what we find when we examine our immediate situation is consciousness or the ego, Heidegger wants to say that what we discover immediately is something that can be summarized simply as *being there* — in other words, *being-in-the-world*.

Being-in-the-world is not to be construed as a special spatial relationship, as if here is the world and I am located within it the way a wad of paper is in a wastebasket. Rather, "being in" has to do with a certain kind of engagement — as when I say I am in philosophy. It is not a spatial relationship; what I mean is that philosophy defines me in terms of my involvement with it. All in all, what Heidegger wants to say is that the distinction between mind, consciousness, or subjectivity on the one hand and the external world or objectivity on the other is to miss the point entirely and to set oneself off on a hopeless trajectory. What he proposes instead is that being-in-the-world is an absolutely unitary phenomenon, and the first fact about *Dasein* is that it simply *is* being-in-the-world.

This means there can be no *Dasein* if there is not a world. Philosophers have often talked about consciousness or the soul as if it could exist independently of the body — indeed, independently of the whole world. Socrates long ago imagined himself as nothing but a pure soul thinking philosophy. Christian philosophers for centuries have argued that the soul is in some sense completely free of the body and can exist without it, or so the suggestion goes, without the

material world altogether. What Heidegger says is that for *Dasein* to exist is for it to exist in the world. There is no *Dasein* without the world. Conversely, approaching things from a phenomenological standpoint, one wants to say there is also no world without *Dasein*.

So one of the first existential structures is simply the fact that *Dasein* is in the world as a unitary structure with the world. As we pursue our phenomenology of *Dasein*, what we are doing is clarifying being. The word Heidegger often uses here is that philosophy allows us to *disclose* what is already there, or sometimes he will say that being discloses itself. The idea is that it is not as if we perform some sort of inference, and it is not as if things simply present themselves to us full-face. Rather, as we engage in the world, we find things, and what he is about is trying to explain what this means. The technical term often used to describe this process of disclosing — this describing of the ways in which things appear, which necessarily involves interpretation — is *hermeneutics*, a concept that itself becomes a major force in twentieth-century European philosophy.

Care, Moods, and Primordial Engagement

When we are talking about and describing *Dasein*, we have to get away from a certain theoretical attitude. In particular, we have to get away from the idea that *Dasein* itself is primarily theoretical. To say it is ontological is to say it asks questions, and many of those questions give rise to theory. But theory itself is fairly ethereal; it is not, as Heidegger would say, primordial. Our basic engagement in the world is not theoretical. It does not have to do with knowledge but rather with engagement.

The second point about *Dasein* is that it is not only being-in-the-world, but being-in-the-world in a certain kind of way — namely, it is engaged in tasks. Consequently, where other philosophers talk as if

our primary relationship to the world is to *know* it, what Heidegger wants to say is that our primary relationship to the world is to be *involved* in it, to *care* about it. Care, in fact, becomes a central concept for Heidegger. To understand who we are, what *Dasein* is, and how it fits into the world is first of all to say that we care about things. This is not to say that we care for other people in the ordinary affective sense — Heidegger himself would probably not strike us as a particularly caring person. Nor does care here necessarily mean worry and anxiety, though these concepts do fall into Heidegger's philosophy as well. Caring means simply having purposes, having emotions, having moods, being attached to the world in an involved way.

The discussion of emotions and moods here, which Heidegger develops at some length, should not be construed as suggesting that these are things located inside us, psychological states or anything of that sort. Along with eliminating talk about consciousness and experience, he also eliminates a good deal of what is ordinarily called psychology. Rather, there is a sense in which moods are *in the world*. As Heidegger puts it in a very clever play on words — *Stimmung*, meaning both mood and the tuning of an instrument — our moods *tune* us to the world. Wittgenstein says at one point that a depressed man lives in a depressed world, and Heidegger, I think, picks up very much the same thought when he talks about our moods orienting us, putting us in a state such that we can deal with the things we deal with. If one goes to the world with a mood of resignation as opposed to a mood of ambition, one of course sees the world in very different ways.

The underlying point is that our engagement in the world — our being-in-the-world — is to be construed not in terms of philosophical thoughts or scientific knowledge, but first of all in terms of everyday tasks. Take housework as an example. If you are

making the bed, cleaning the floor, washing the dishes, there is a good chance you are not thinking about what you are doing at all. You are just doing it. You have done it many times before. You know it has to be done. To talk about knowledge here would be very odd; or, to put it another way, *knowing how* is an essential part of doing housework, but *knowing that* — propositional knowledge — is a kind of secondary concept.

Equipment, the Ready-to-Hand, and the Present-at-Hand

Heidegger's way of putting this is to say: the world appears to us, first of all, as *equipment*. To say the world is equipment is to say that when, for example, I pick up a mop to clean the floor, I do not see the mop as a thing. I do not study it. I do not adopt what John Dewey, his contemporary, called the spectator view of knowledge. Rather, I simply use it — use it to do what needs to be done — and in fact I never really attend to it as a thing at all.

This changes the philosophical question. The question now becomes: how do we come to see things *as* things? Philosophers like Kant would argue that one of the basic categories of the mind is that we must see the world in terms of objects. What Heidegger tells us is that this is not the way we primordially see the world at all. We use things, and taking the mop as our example, the question is: when do I actually look at it? When do I look at it as an object? The short answer is when it *misfunctions* — when something gets caught at the mop's end, when the handle breaks, or when I get a splinter running my hand down the shaft. At that point I will hold it out and actually look at it as a mop. In general, the idea of seeing the world in terms of objects is derivative of the idea of being engaged in the world. Engagement is the primary concept. So when we talk about being-

in-the-world, we are not talking simply about the world of science; Heidegger is in fact very often hostile to the world of science. Rather, we are talking about a world in which we *do* things.

Running through Heidegger's philosophy is an almost obsessive attachment to a simpler life — a life in which people are simply involved in their tasks, involved with the earth in a very straightforward way. He is well known for his peasant hut in the Schwarzwald, where he quite frankly preferred having a beer with local neighbors to receiving the many eminent philosophers who tried to visit him. There is a sense in which this basic engagement in the world, as opposed to the more cerebral and especially the more technological ways in which we deal with the world, is always on his mind. The idea is that when we talk about being, what we are ultimately talking about is not some grand theoretical concept so much as something very immediate and practical.

This raises another question. When I see the mop as a thing, part of what I see at that point is the mop as a distinctive object, distinct from everything else in my kitchen. But insofar as the mop is a piece of equipment, Heidegger wants to say it is simply part of the totality of equipment. You cannot separate the mop from the floor, from the soapsuds. What is more, you cannot simply separate me from the mop, from the totality of equipment. Because while I am mopping, I am not at all self-conscious of what I am doing. I am not thinking of myself at all, at least insofar as I am mopping. In a sense, the "I" simply does not make an appearance — I am engaged in the task. And insofar as there is any notion of self at all, it is simply the self as engaged in the task.

The Self, Authenticity, and the *das Man*

This raises a host of further questions, because philosophers have often talked as if the self is something rather immediately knowable, as if the self, in one form or another, is present in every experience. When Descartes says, "I think, therefore I am," he suggests that all you have to do is reflect for a moment and you realize that you exist. Heidegger asks a much more difficult question: what if the self we ordinarily refer to is not the true self at all? What if it is some sort of bogus self — not what he will call our *authentic* self? Then the question of the self becomes just as problematic as the notion of thinghood in the earlier part of his philosophy.

What Heidegger argues is that when we normally refer to ourselves and think of ourselves, we are not in fact referring to our authentic selves at all. We tend to think of "authentic," in its English translation, simply as meaning genuine or true self — and I have even been using that phrase. That is certainly involved in what Heidegger is doing, but a more accurate translation and a better conception of what he has in mind has to do with being *one's own* self, as when we say of someone that he is his own man. It has a ring of individuality to it. Heidegger defines it at one point as *taking hold of oneself*.

One can see here the shadow of two of his favorite authors, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, both of whom were staunch individualists. Kierkegaard insisted that one must be a Christian in one's own terms, without reference to other people and how they think of you. And Nietzsche, of course, has a long argument against what he calls slave morality, in which we find ourselves submerged in the herd, thinking in terms of mutual protection rather than in terms of our own personal excellence. There is a sense in which authenticity carries much of this baggage and is very much a kind of individualist notion.

Authenticity is contrasted, of course, with inauthenticity — with what Heidegger refers to as the *das Man* self. This is another coinage, like *Dasein*. It comes from the German expression *man ist*, meaning "one is" — an anonymous, indefinite expression, purely grammatical, that does not refer to any particular person. What Heidegger is doing here is considering the self as anonymous. The self we usually refer to is, in an important sense, an anonymous self, and that is precisely what makes it inauthentic. It is not one's own self. What he has in mind is a kind of social construal of the self.

When you think of how you describe yourself, for instance, in America you often do so in terms of what you do — your function, your job. In China, if you are asked who you are, the answer will probably be that you are a member of a particular family, perhaps the third son or the second daughter. In both cases, we identify ourselves in terms of social constructs. This is true even when we try to describe ourselves more individually: we describe ourselves as intelligent, for example. But of course intelligence is a comparative notion — it is not something one simply is in isolation; it compares us with other people. The *das Man* self is inauthentic insofar as it is strictly a social self. It is not one's own self at all.

The Three Existential Modes: Existence, Facticity, and Fallenness

In a further analysis of *Dasein*, Heidegger tells us that there are three essential existential modes. The first, very briefly, is what he calls *existence* — a term he takes directly from Kierkegaard — where existence is not something which simply means occupying a place in the world the way a pot occupies a place on a shelf. Rather, existence is a very special notion, and it is not something human beings

exercise all the time. Existence has to do with possibilities and choices.

This is to be contrasted with what Heidegger calls *facticity* — a term that Jean-Paul Sartre will borrow from him, and perhaps more famously develop. Facticity has to do with all those aspects of ourselves that are simply given. In a very dramatic phrase, Heidegger tells us: we are *thrown* into the world. We are born at a certain time, in a certain place, of certain parents, in a certain historical epoch, and we have no choice about any of this. We come to appreciate the contingency of our lives when we imagine, for example, being born in the thirteenth century, or being born ten years earlier or later. But there is a sense in which we cannot really get into those positions, because the fact is that our *Dasein* is very much wedded to where we happen to be thrown in life.

The third category is *fallenness*. The term harks back to the biblical story of the Fall, and certainly Heidegger has something of that sense in mind. Fallenness is falling back from our sense of authenticity to the inauthentic self — falling back from being one's own person to simply being part of the crowd. It is very important to emphasize, though, that Heidegger does not present this in a critical way. Fallenness — simply being involved in tasks and involved with other people in tasks — is an essential part of our existence. We cannot possibly escape it; we could not be authentic all the time. The idea is that fallenness provides a contrast with existence, which involves seeing our own possibilities in terms of our future, and with facticity, which involves seeing who we are in terms of our past. Fallenness is simply being involved in the present, being caught up in our current tasks. That is something we all find ourselves doing, and Heidegger would say that is perfectly fine — that is what it is to be a *Dasein*.

But this raises a very difficult question about the extent to which Heidegger's philosophy is also a kind of ethics. Heidegger says, with

almost neurotic vehemence, that it is nothing of the sort, and he makes fun of people who do ethics and fish in the muddy waters of value. Nevertheless, you cannot really approach terms like authenticity and inauthenticity without understanding that Heidegger is giving us a kind of desideratum — saying that authenticity is a kind of achievement. Fallenness is, by definition, pre-ontological: it is falling back to the point where we are no longer asking the kinds of questions he urges us to ask. But authenticity is precisely being ontological — asking those questions, understanding ourselves in a profound way, not simply dissipating our lives in mere curiosity or idle chatter, but in an important sense facing up to who we really are.

Conscience and Being-toward-Death

Facing up to who we really are — becoming authentic — is premised on two other essential structures of *Dasein*. The first is the idea of *conscience*. Here Heidegger joins a long tradition of continental philosophers in making the suggestion that we are all, in some essential sense, guilty — not guilty of original sin, not guilty of any particular transgression, but simply guilty. Conscience for Heidegger is not to be construed as the voice of God within us, nor as a Freudian superego, the voice of one's parents. Rather, conscience is that nagging voice inside of us that always reminds us, as we are engaged in our activities — as we are perhaps a little too comfortable in our jobs, or simply settling back into a marriage — that we can be something more, that something is missing. That does not mean you should quit your job or leave your marriage. What it means is that to become your own self is to reinsert yourself in that job and in that marriage in an entirely different way.

The other essential structure through which Heidegger talks about being prompted into authenticity goes by the dramatic name *being-toward-death*. In one sense, of course, we all know we are going to die. But for most of us, it is an abstraction. For an eighteen-year-old, they are going to die — but probably not for another fifty thousand years. For most of us who have actually looked into the jaws of death and survived, we still understand death in a kind of abstract way. We know that all men are mortal. We know, somehow, that I in particular seem immortal. And therefore, I will die — but it does not really sink in. It is just abstract, just a piece of knowledge.

But when you genuinely face death, something very interesting happens. According to a great many ancient legends, what you find is that your whole life flashes before your eyes. This does not mean you simply find yourself watching a biographical video. Rather, you suddenly see your life as a whole. You are suddenly shaken free from your various roles and functions in society to attend to just you — and to the sense in which you are special to yourself. It might be that if you had never existed, the world would not miss you. But if you had never existed — and there is no way to make this absolutely sensible — the truth is, you would miss you. And that is what being-toward-death forces you to see. What is your life as a whole? That is what it means to be authentic. To be authentic is to use this confrontation to make a resolution — namely, to be your own person.

Conclusion: Authenticity, Tradition, and the Nazi Involvement

There is, however, a problem here. If inauthenticity is simply falling back into the crowd, doing what one is supposed to do, and authenticity is this kind of breaking away from the crowd to become

one's own person — which might be construed in traditional philosophical terms as a form of alienation — it is precisely this form of alienation that Heidegger bitterly rejects in modern technological consumer society. His answer is that what we should do is reinsert ourselves in our traditions and our heritage, and identify ourselves with what we have grown up with.

This provides a kind of justification for his joining the Nazi Party and going along with what his society was doing in the 1930s. What it does not justify or explain, however, is why he continued to hold with the Nazi Party and never repented of or rejected its atrocities.

Lecture 70: Wittgenstein and Language Analysis

Professor Mark Risjord

Introduction: Wittgenstein's Life and Background

Ludwig Wittgenstein is one of the most curious and intriguing figures in twentieth-century philosophy. He published one book during his lifetime, the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. It was published when he was in his twenties, and his later work was published posthumously as the *Philosophical Investigations*. In his later work, he criticized his earlier work, and through that criticism we can see a profound critique of modern philosophy as a whole.

I would like to begin with some biographical details, because they are important for understanding Wittgenstein's work. He did not come into philosophy through the ordinary routes. He was not classically trained, and the way in which he entered philosophy influences his work both early and late. He was born in Vienna, Austria in 1889. His father was an immensely wealthy industrialist, on the scale of the Carnegies and the Rockefellers in the United States. He was well-schooled as a result, but he was not an intellectual in the conventional sense. At the age of nine, he built a working model of a sewing machine from bits of wood and wire. In 1906, he went to study engineering in Berlin, and he became interested in the most romantic of the turn-of-the-century inventions: the airplane. In 1908, he went to Manchester, England, to become a research assistant in aeronautics.

It was while he was in England that he became interested in philosophy, and the questions that interested him arose out of his study of mathematics as an engineer. At the turn of the century, very interesting work was being done in logic and the foundations of

mathematics by Gottlob Frege and Bertrand Russell. Wittgenstein studied Frege's and Russell's works and went to Cambridge to study with Russell. Russell immediately recognized him as a genius and came to regard him as his philosophical successor at Cambridge. Wittgenstein only managed to study for two years before World War I broke out. The crisis occurred while he was home visiting in Austria, and he joined the German army.

The Problem of Non-Existence and Two Views of Meaning

To understand what Wittgenstein was interested in, you have to see what Russell and Frege were interested in. There is a problem they were concerned to resolve, sometimes called the problem of non-existence. Consider the sentence "Pegasus flies." That seems like a meaningful sentence, but what is it about? Grammatically, the subject is the word "Pegasus," so it seems to be saying something about Pegasus. But Pegasus doesn't exist, so the sentence is about nothing. And if it's about nothing, it seems to be meaningless. So that doesn't seem right. What are we going to do about this puzzle? Well, to think about it, we need to know something about word meaning — in what does the meaning of a word consist?

There are two views I want to talk about today, because Wittgenstein ends up criticizing both of them in a fairly profound way. They are quite natural views — the kinds of ideas that come immediately to mind when you ask what word meaning consists in.

The first is that the meaning of a word is a thing. This works very nicely for proper names. The meaning of the name "Bill Clinton" is the president, the person. The meaning of the name "Mark Risjord" is me. For a word like "horse," the meaning might be the set of all horses, or perhaps the property of being a horse. Notice, however,

that this view gives us no help at all with the puzzle of non-existence. On this view, a word is meaningful only if it corresponds to an object. So "Pegasus flies" comes out as meaningless — no help at all.

The second view is that the meaning of a word is an idea in the mind of a speaker. This is a venerable philosophical view, expressed in a clear form by Locke. On this kind of view, a word like "Pegasus" has as its meaning an idea — perhaps a mental image in my mind — and the word "flies" similarly corresponds to an image in my mind. On this view, I can meaningfully speak about non-existent objects, since all I need for meaning is an idea in my mind. But consider the sentence "Pegasus does not exist." That seems both meaningful and true. Yet my idea of Pegasus does exist. The word is meaningful, so there is an idea corresponding to it in my mind. On this view, then, "Pegasus does not exist" turns out to be false — Pegasus really exists, as a mental idea. It becomes impossible, on this kind of view, to truly say of anything that it doesn't exist.

Russell's Solution and the Method of Analytic Philosophy

Russell had an ingenious solution to this problem of non-existence. He suggested that the puzzle arises from a linguistic mistake. "Pegasus" is grammatically a name, but logically it is not. It is an abbreviation for a complex description — perhaps something like "winged horse." So when we say "Pegasus flies," what we are really saying is: there is something that has the following properties — it is a horse, it has wings, and it is flying. These predicates can be meaningful. They refer to properties. And they all exist, so there is no problem. When I say "Pegasus does not exist," what I am saying is: there is no thing that has the properties of being a horse with wings. So the sentence can be both meaningful and true.

I pause over this bit of technical detail because it illustrates a very important point of philosophical method — one that was central to analytic philosophy, the kind of philosophy that dominated English and American thought in the first half of the twentieth century. For the analytic philosophers, philosophical problems arise from linguistic mistakes. This is why, on their account, philosophy has made so little progress. Philosophers in the past have made linguistic mistakes, gotten confused, been inspired to think about puzzles like the problem of non-existence, and then spun out elaborate philosophical theories to solve them. But the solution is not to give a philosophical theory — it is to uncover why we got confused in the first place. In particular, why we got confused about the logic of our language. What we need to do is focus on the logical form of our sentences, and through that analysis, either solve the problems or show why there was not really a problem in the first place.

The Early Wittgenstein: The *Tractatus* and the Picture Theory of Meaning

In his early work, Wittgenstein was committed to this principle of logical analysis and thought that focusing on the logical form of sentences would help get us clear about metaphysical issues. In his early work, the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, he adopted the first view of meaning I mentioned — the idea that the meaning of a word is a thing. In Wittgenstein's work, this is usually called the picture theory of meaning. The idea is that when we have properly analyzed a sentence, each element — each word — will refer to a thing, and the sentence will have a logical arrangement of those words that mirrors the logical arrangement of the things. The *Tractatus* provided, in principle, a method of analyzing every sentence into its ultimate logical constituents. And of course, since philosophical

puzzlement arises from mistakes about logical form, once we have the right analysis, there is no more philosophy to be done.

Wittgenstein recognized this in the preface to the *Tractatus*. He wrote:

This book deals with the problems of philosophy and shows, I believe, that the reason these problems are posed is that the logic of our language is misunderstood. The truth of the thoughts communicated here seems to me unassailable and definitive. I therefore believe myself to have found, on all essential points, the final solution of these problems. And if I am not mistaken in this belief, then the value of this work is that it shows how little is achieved when these problems are solved.

Wittgenstein wrote the *Tractatus* while serving in the German army during World War I. After the war, he tried unsuccessfully to publish it. He ultimately sent it to Russell and told him to do with it as he wished. Russell did find a publisher. Wittgenstein then proceeded to give up philosophy altogether and train as an elementary school teacher — after all, he had solved the problems. His work was done. He taught school in rural Austria between 1920 and 1926. He was not very good at it, and at the end of this period the people of the village more or less ran him out of town. He tried his hand at a couple of other pursuits: he worked as an architect for a while, overseeing the construction of a house being built for his sister.

In the meantime, in England, the *Tractatus* had become an immediate classic. Russell found a publisher, had it translated, and wrote the introduction to the book himself. When Wittgenstein finally saw the introduction, he didn't like it much — and scholars have since agreed that Russell probably misunderstood what Wittgenstein was doing. Nevertheless, the *Tractatus* became required

reading for anyone serious about philosophy in England in the 1920s.

Wittgenstein was eventually persuaded to return to philosophy and came back to Cambridge in 1929. By that time, his reputation was already enormous on the basis of his one book. The Cambridge philosopher G. E. Moore happened by pure chance to encounter Wittgenstein as he was returning to Cambridge — they were on the same train from London. When Moore got home, he said to his wife: "I saw God on the 5:15."

Russell and Moore wanted Wittgenstein to teach, but of course he didn't have a degree — he had only been at Cambridge for two years before the war. So what they did was have him submit the *Tractatus*, already a classic, as a doctoral dissertation. They conducted an oral examination, going through all the proper formalities of the degree. At the examination, Russell and Moore fired questions at him, and he answered them. At the end of it, Wittgenstein patted them on the shoulder and said, "Don't worry — I know you'll never understand it."

Return to Philosophy: Critique of the Picture Theory

Wittgenstein spent the rest of his life criticizing his own work on the *Tractatus*, and through that criticism, the foundations of modern philosophy. The result was arguably a radically new philosophical perspective, and that is what I want to focus on now.

Let me start with Wittgenstein's critique of the picture theory. A question to ask about the picture theory is: how do words get connected with one thing rather than another? Why does a given word mean one object? Why does "Bill Clinton" refer to the man in the White House and "Mark Risjord" refer to me, and not the other way around? What is the connection between the words and the things that are their meanings?

To answer this kind of question, Wittgenstein devised the concept of a language game. A language game is a multifaceted concept in Wittgenstein's philosophy, and we will see several of its aspects today. The first is that it is a philosophical tool. The strategy is to take a claim or theory about language and imagine that it is the whole truth about a simplified or primitive language. The object is to fill out the philosophical claim, give it a clear sense, and — most importantly — find the limits of the claim. It is, in other words, a critical tool.

Here is the language game Wittgenstein suggests to exemplify the picture theory of meaning. He writes:

Let us imagine a language for which the picture theory is right. The language is meant to serve for communication between a builder, A, and an assistant, B. A is building with building stones. There are blocks, pillars, slabs, and beams. B has to pass the stones in the order in which A needs them. For this purpose they use a language consisting of the words "block," "pillar," "slab," "beam." A calls them out; B brings the stone which he has learned to bring at such and such a call. Conceive this as a complete primitive language.

Notice how perfectly this satisfies a picture theory of meaning. Every word in the language stands for a thing. The meaning of "block" is a particular kind of object. The meaning of "slab" is another. Sentences are different combinations of names, and different orders mean different things. If the builder wants a block and then a slab, she says "block, slab." The assistant brings a block and then a slab. If she wants a slab first, she says "slab, block." In each case, the sentence is a picture of the state of affairs it is meant to describe.

Now notice, first of all, how limited this language is. You cannot say very much with it. You cannot say "two slabs," or "bring them here." Wittgenstein notices this and says: well, why not just add these words to the language to make it a little richer? So we add number

words — one, two, three — and we add "here" and "there." Now the builder can say "slab here," and the assistant runs over, gets a slab, and puts it in the right place. Or "two slabs."

But now the language game no longer accurately represents the picture theory. Every word is supposed to stand for a thing, and sentences are supposed to mirror facts. But what thing does the word "here" stand for? Similarly with the word "two." Philosophers have often thought that number words refer to abstract objects — some sort of elusive, non-concrete entities. But that doesn't seem right in this language game.

Compare these two sentences: "two blocks here" and "slab block here." According to the conventions of the game, "slab block here" means: bring me a slab, and then bring me a block. But if "two" is a name, then "two blocks here" means: bring me the number two, and then bring me a block. That's absurd — that's not what the sentence means at all. The word "two," like the word "here," has a fundamentally different role in the language game than the words "block" and "slab."

Wittgenstein wrote that when we think about language, it is sometimes like looking into the cabin of a locomotive. We see handles all looking more or less alike — naturally, since they are all supposed to be handles. But one is the handle of a crank, which can be moved continuously and regulates the opening of a valve. Another is the handle of a switch, which has only two effective positions, either on or off. A third is the handle of a brake lever: the harder you pull, the harder it brakes. A fourth is the handle of a pump, which has effect only so long as it is moved back and forth.

The mistake of the picture theory of meaning is to treat all words as if they are names. We look into the cabin of the locomotive and we see them all looking more or less the same — all the words look like

they name something. But when you look more closely, they are not all doing the same thing. Words like "here" and "two" have different functions in the use of even a simple language game like the builders', not to mention our more complex usages, than the words "block" and "slab."

Language Games, Meaning as Use, and Family Resemblance

The philosophical upshot is that perhaps by looking at the actual functioning of language — the way words are actually used — we might gain insight into what word meaning is. This suggests a new and positive role for the concept of language games. In Wittgenstein's philosophy, language games are also the real activities, practices, and social contexts in which language is used. Attention to real uses of language will provide philosophical illumination.

One thing we can illuminate in this way is the ancient doctrine of essentialism. Since Plato and Aristotle, philosophers have often thought that concepts can be defined in terms of species and differentia — you say what kind of thing something is and list the features that distinguish it from other things of the same kind. The concept "beagle" might be defined as a dog (its species) with short legs, long ears, and whatever else distinguishes it from dachshunds. On this view, concepts have a core of features exhibited by all and only their proper instances. In short, things have essences, and these essences are captured by the true definition of a thing. Notice how this doctrine of essences fits neatly together with a picture theory of meaning: a word like "dog" or "granite" refers to the essential properties of dogs or granite.

The critique of the picture theory we find in the *Philosophical Investigations* also gives us a way of critiquing the doctrine of essences, and Wittgenstein used it this way. There are many language games which simply do not function in the way the philosopher presupposes. Consider the word "game" — one of Wittgenstein's examples. What do all games have in common? What is the essence of a game? Do they all have two players? No — solitaire doesn't have two players. Do they all have winning and losing? No — if I am bouncing a ball off a wall, I am playing a game, but there is no winner or loser. Are they all played for fun? It is not obvious that professional hockey is played for fun.

We could go on looking for essential features, but we have gotten off on the wrong foot. What makes us think there has to be some common core to the usage of the word "game" in order for it to be meaningful? Wittgenstein observed that concepts like this have a different sort of structure, which he called *family resemblance*. The metaphor is quite tractable. We can recognize members of a family, but it doesn't have to be the case that they all share the same feature. Hannah has the same hair as Cousin Will. Cousin Will has Aunt Carol's eyes. Aunt Carol has the same high cheekbones as Andrea. Andrea and Hannah have similar noses. There is a family resemblance — overlapping features — but there is not one single feature that they all share.

Similarly, for a concept like "game," Wittgenstein contended, there is no essential feature shared by all and only games, but there are many overlapping features. For any given case where we use the word "game," we can say it is similar to other games in these ways. There is overlap throughout, but no one single thing runs through the whole set.

The moral is simple but profound: just because there is a word for something does not mean there is a hidden essence that unifies all

its instances. Just because we have a word, we should not, as philosophers, go running off looking for the one thing that corresponds to it. Just because we have a word for something, it does not follow that there is a thing that corresponds to it. This simple point has enormous ramifications. Recall that Russell, Frege, and the analytic philosophers — indeed, philosophers throughout history — have thought that analyzing our concepts, finding the logical structure of our sentences, would provide insight into metaphysics and yield philosophical first principles. But if the critique that emerges from the *Philosophical Investigations* is right, language and logic do not mirror the world. So we cannot use an analysis of language or logical tools as a source of philosophical principles, and they are not going to yield metaphysical insight.

So, returning to the original question: how do words hook up with things? What is the connection between a name like "Bill Clinton" and the man? The lesson so far is that we need to look at language games — where these words are actually used — to unravel this kind of question. In the builder's language, the connection between the word "block" and blocks is simply this: when the builder says "block," the assistant grabs a block and brings it over. The connection between the words and the things — the reason "block" stands for block and not slab — is that that is how the builder and the assistant behave. That is the way they act. The connection between words and things is mediated by our linguistic practices.

We can easily extend this to "game" as well. It is a fact about our usage of the word "game" that there is no single feature we are picking out every time we say it. There is a whole family of different things with overlapping features. When we say what the word "game" means, we are describing the role it has in our linguistic practices. The slogan of the *Philosophical Investigations* is: *the meaning of a word is its use in the language*.

What is fundamental to linguistic meaning, on Wittgenstein's view, is the verbal behavior and the practices that surround the use of a word. We utter a word in a particular kind of circumstance. The utterance is accompanied by certain actions. Things happen before it and after it. This is its function — its role in our linguistic economy — and those facts ultimately constitute word meaning. The meaning of a word is its use in the language.

The thesis that meaning is use makes word meaning a public, social kind of thing. It is not a private fact. It is a fact about communities, ultimately. Meaning is on the surface of our linguistic practices, not hidden in essences.

The Private Language Argument

There is a quite natural objection to the idea that meaning is public. In some cases, meaning seems to be a private matter. Consider the sentence "I have a headache." The headache is mine. I am the one who feels it. In some sense, I am the one who knows — perhaps the only one who could know — that it is really there. So how could meaning be a matter of use for a word like "headache"? It seems to be a matter of naming or reporting my feelings, not something public.

Notice how this idea dovetails neatly with the other view of meaning mentioned at the beginning of this lecture — the idea theory. I know I have a headache. I have a word for it. I can name my experience. And when I say "I have a headache," I am referring to my experience. It is natural to extend this to all of language.

Notice also that the idea theory of meaning is deeply entwined in modern philosophy. Think of Descartes' project. Descartes set out to doubt everything he could doubt. One of the first things he comes to doubt is whether there is anything really out there — whether there

are really tables and chairs beyond his impressions of tables and chairs, beyond his ideas. He is quite certain that he has certain sorts of experiences, feelings, and visual images, but he doubts that anything beyond himself can be known to exist. And notice what he cannot doubt: he cannot doubt that his words are meaningful. He is presupposing that in this world of pure sensation, he can simply label experiences as they come along, and can talk about them and generalize about them. Much of modern philosophy arises from this standpoint — starting with my experiences and working my way outward, trying to prove that there is an external world and to understand what kind of ontological structure it has.

Wittgenstein recognized this presupposition of modern philosophy and called it into question in a deep way, in a passage usually called the private language argument, found in the *Philosophical Investigations*. When thinking about whether I can name my experiences, he wrote:

Let us imagine the following case. I want to keep a diary about the recurrence of a certain sensation. To this end I associate it with the sign S and write this sign in a calendar for every day on which I have the sensation.

Rather like Descartes — Descartes has his sensations, and he wants to have names for them. When a sensation comes along, he will recognize it and make a mark on his calendar.

Now we can ask the same question we asked earlier: what is the connection between the word and the meaning? Between the sign S and the sensation? It seems perfectly transparent at first. But think about it this way. If a word refers to a thing or to a sensation, there has to be a difference between correct and incorrect applications of the word. I have to be able to get it wrong. It applies to some things and not others. We can express these criteria in terms of rules. For

the builder's language, we have a rule: the word "block" refers to things like that. In the sensation language, the sign S refers to a certain feeling I have. So private language presupposes that I could propose rules to myself and judge whether I am following them correctly.

But on this philosophical picture, all I have to work with is my present experiences. The only thing I can rely on is my feeling that this sensation is the same as the one I had yesterday. So when I write S on the calendar, I have the feeling that I am following the rule. But all I have to work with is my present sensation. The past sensation is gone. I have a present sensation and the feeling that this one is the same as the last one — the feeling that I am following the rule.

I could have the feeling of following the rule and not be following the rule at all. I could have one sensation one day, with the feeling "this is the same as yesterday," and a different sensation the next day, again with the feeling "this is the same as yesterday." I could be having different sensations every day, each associated with the feeling that it is the same as the one before. Wittgenstein writes:

In the present case I have no criterion of correctness. One would like to say: whatever is going to seem right to me is right. And that only means that here we can't talk about "right."

If we cannot talk about right and wrong, there is no rule for the application of the word. Without a rule, the word has no meaning. It is an illusion that I could, using only the resources of my present experience, have a rule that tells me how to apply a sign like S to my feelings. The Cartesian picture — and the picture of modern philosophy that shares that standpoint — rests on a philosophical fantasy: the idea that you could have correct and incorrect applications of a rule with nothing but your present experiences and the feeling that this is the same as the last one. If Wittgenstein is

right in the private language argument, that is impossible. It is nothing but a philosophical fantasy.

Psychological Concepts and Double-Sidedness

So what did Wittgenstein think about a sentence like "I have a headache"? He thought that psychological phenomena were necessarily two-sided. He did a great deal of work on this in the *Investigations* and never arrived at a fully satisfactory account, but he wrote quite extensively about it. The central idea is that a psychological term like "headache" must have both a feeling side and a behavioral side. Descartes, of course, splits the two and makes them independent — you can have the feeling without the behavior, and the behavior without the feeling. For Wittgenstein, the very concept of a headache involves both. Any psychological term involves both a subjective feeling and particular ways of behaving. People who have headaches typically behave in certain characteristic ways.

His argument for this double-sidedness of our psychological concepts is that if they did not have this structure, it would be impossible for children to learn words like "headache." They would never know how to apply such a word even in their own case. They would have no public criteria on which to rely.

Conclusion: Where Does Philosophy Begin?

The *Philosophical Investigations* is a profound critique of both Wittgenstein's own early work and the whole of modern philosophy. Much of philosophy has been engaged in trying to find the right description of the ultimate structure of the world, and philosophers have tried to cut through ordinary language to uncover the deeper

logical forms that reflect the true structure of reality. This view pretty clearly depends on something like the picture theory of meaning, and if Wittgenstein's critique of that theory is right, that approach is not tenable. Other parts of philosophy have similarly depended on the idea theory of language. I have mentioned Descartes, but we could equally mention Locke, Hume, Kant, and Husserl. All of these philosophers took experience as a starting point for philosophy, and this presupposes the idea theory of meaning and the coherence of a private language. But if Wittgenstein is right, that is not a possible starting point for philosophy either.

So where does philosophy begin for Wittgenstein? It begins in the world — with people, and things, and objects, and tables and chairs. From this standpoint, questions like the Cartesian question about the existence of the external world, or the existence of other minds, do not make any sense at all. We have already started in a world with people and tables and chairs.

There are still genuine philosophical problems, and in an interesting way Wittgenstein has transformed the method of analytic philosophy. Recall that Russell and the early Wittgenstein thought that by analyzing the logic of a sentence they could understand the logical structure of the world, and that philosophical problems were therefore linguistic problems. But of course the later Wittgenstein has already criticized that view. In the later Wittgenstein, philosophical problems remain linguistic problems — but it is not a matter of arriving at the right analysis of the sentence. Rather, philosophical problems arise when our language games get tangled. We start using words that have a home in one language game alongside words that have a home in another, and we start to say things that we find puzzling. What sort of object is the number two? That might seem to call for a great deal of philosophical thought, and we might spin out a whole philosophical theory. But

Wittgenstein says the appropriate response to that kind of question is not a philosophical theory — it is a kind of therapy. What we need to do is look at the language games in which these words have their home, untangle them, put them back in their proper place, and in the end arrive not at a philosophical theory but at peace.

He wrote:

Philosophical problems are not empirical problems. They are solved rather by looking into the workings of our language, and in such a way as to make us recognize those workings in despite of an urge to misunderstand them. The problems are solved not by giving new information but by arranging what we have always known.

We get confused when our language games intertwine and become tangled. The solution is to attend carefully to the actual usage of the words and untangle the language games. And when the philosopher's work is done, we do not have a new subtle theory. We have no theory at all. Philosophy, he wrote in the *Philosophical Investigations*, is a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language.

Lecture 71: The Frankfurt School

Professor Douglas Kellner

Introduction

I am Douglas Kellner. I teach philosophy, social theory, and cultural studies at UCLA. I am the author of a book on critical theory, *Marxism and Modernity*, on the Frankfurt School, co-editor of a critical theory reader, and author of a book on Herbert Marcuse.

The great minds of the Western intellectual tradition that we are going to engage today are the members of the so-called Frankfurt School, who developed highly original and provocative perspectives on contemporary civilization — perspectives that included critiques of state and monopoly capitalism, advanced industrial society, the culture industry, and the high-tech consumer society that we find ourselves in. The Frankfurt School provided some of the first truly penetrating critiques of the modern contemporary era.

The term "Frankfurt School" refers to a group of German and American scholars who worked first in Frankfurt, Germany in the 1930s. They were Jews; they were radicals. When Hitler and the Nazis came to power, they were forced into exile. They emigrated to the United States and ended up at Columbia University, where they continued their work in philosophy, social theory, and critical analysis of the contemporary era.

Key Members of the Frankfurt School

The members of the Frankfurt School include several remarkable figures. Herbert Marcuse probably emerged as the most important and famous member of the group when he became the guru of the

New Left in the 1960s, writing books like *One-Dimensional Man*, *An Essay on Liberation*, *Eros and Civilization*, and many other highly significant works.

The director of the Institute for Social Research that developed critical theory was Max Horkheimer, a distinguished philosopher and social theorist who wrote many books on contemporary philosophy and contributed in major ways — as I will indicate today — to the development of a critical theory of society. Theodor W. Adorno was another member of the group, a major philosopher and social critic, perhaps one of the great theorists of music of the twentieth century, and one of the great critics of mass culture.

Another member of the Frankfurt School was Erich Fromm, who became one of the most widely read writers in the United States during the period of emigration, writing books like *Escape from Freedom* in 1941 — one of the first critical analyses of German fascism, introducing that phenomenon to an English-speaking audience. He also wrote popular bestsellers like *Man for Himself* and *The Art of Loving*, which I will discuss later. Leo Lowenthal was a major literary and cultural critic who was another important member of the group. And finally, Jürgen Habermas has emerged as the most influential contemporary representative of the Frankfurt School, and is himself the subject of a subsequent lecture in this series.

Today I want to indicate why I think the Frankfurt School is important and discuss some of the major contributions — and limitations — of their work.

The Project of Critical Theory

The project of the Frankfurt School was to develop a critical theory of contemporary society that would combine philosophy, social theory, economics, and cultural criticism in a new type of interdisciplinary

inquiry. In Frankfurt, they brought together philosophers, social theorists, economists, and political scientists to study the institutions of the contemporary era and develop a critical theory of the modern age.

Among their most important contributions is their analysis of state and monopoly capitalism, developed in the 1930s during their exile in the United States. What they did was update the analysis of capitalism that had been developed by Karl Marx in the nineteenth century. Marx had analyzed a stage of market capitalism marked by competition among family firms and businesses. The Frankfurt School argued that beginning in the late nineteenth century, a new era of monopoly capitalism had emerged — a more organized form of capitalism, with monopolies, cartels, and a bureaucratic state, constituting a completely different stage of capitalist development. Think, in the United States, of Rockefeller and the oil industry, or of the monopolies in copper, steel, railroads, and banking — a much more organized economy than the anarchic competitive capitalism that Marx had analyzed.

Moreover, during the 1930s, an era of depression, the state played a much more important role in managing the economy. A form of state monopoly capitalism emerged in which the state was called upon to provide jobs and welfare, to manage fiscal and monetary policy, and to play a far more organized role in everyday social life.

According to the Frankfurt School, there were two main forms of state monopoly capitalism. The first was German fascism — a totalitarian mode of state capitalism in which the state literally took over the economy, the political sphere, and the cultural sphere, attempting to organize and control all forms of social life. The other form was democratic state capitalism, such as the Frankfurt School experienced in the United States. Think of Roosevelt and the New Deal: the beginning of a welfare state, with fiscal and monetary

policy, public employment programs, and social projects to address unemployment, all involving a far more active role of the state in the economy than had existed in the previous era of capitalism.

The Frankfurt School argued that in both forms of state capitalism — democratic and fascist alike — new types of administration, bureaucracy, and social domination had emerged, cutting back on individual freedom and democracy. The result, they claimed, was a mass society marked by homogeneity, standardization, and social conformity, resulting in a decline of individuality and a rise of what they called "massification."

In their vision of new mass societies with new forms of social control and domination, the Frankfurt School were among the first to see the important roles of science, technology, bureaucracy, and the state as instruments of administration and social domination. Moreover, in analyzing the new mass societies, they were among the first to recognize the role of the mass media of culture and communication in reproducing contemporary societies.

In Nazi Germany, the Frankfurt School had witnessed the fascist takeover and control of newspapers, radio, and the film industry, as well as the use of mass rallies and other cultural forms to inculcate German ideology, to indoctrinate the population into fascism, and to sell the ideology of the Führer, the master race, and German expansionism. All of these were reproduced through mass culture and mass communication, which played a central role in German fascism. But when the Frankfurt School arrived in the United States, they saw that American institutions of mass culture and communication were playing an equally important role in selling capitalism, democracy, and the American way of life. They argued that Hollywood film, network radio, advertising, magazines, and newspapers were promoting American ideology, just as fascist ideology was being reproduced through film and radio in Nazi

Germany, and communist ideology was at the heart of film, broadcasting, and newspapers in the Soviet Union.

So the Frankfurt School were among the first critical scholars of mass culture and mass communication to see that what we today simply call "the media" were at the center of social life and social reproduction. This had simply not been perceived before — the essential, central role of mass culture and mass communication.

They were also among the first to see that the consumer society was a new form of capitalism and a new social institution that was integrating the working class into advanced capitalist societies while creating new consumer needs, values, behaviors, and forms of consciousness. During the era of competitive capitalism analyzed by Marx, the working class barely had enough money to survive, let alone to purchase refrigerators or automobiles. But it was Henry Ford who began mass production with the assembly line and gave workers wages sufficient to buy cars. During the 1920s and 1930s, union movements grew stronger and workers' wages rose. Particularly after World War II, a consumer society emerged in which new needs for automobiles, refrigerators, and televisions helped create a new form of consumer capitalism very different from the capitalism that Marx had analyzed. The Frankfurt School were really the first to see that the consumer society was a new social form, and that consumption, advertising, packaging, and design were very important features of contemporary capitalism.

So the Frankfurt School provided many important insights into contemporary societies, analyzing the role of the state and bureaucracy, of science and technology as modes of social control, the role of the culture industry and mass culture and communication, the role of the consumer society, and new forms of culture. They were analyzing the passage from the era of market capitalism and liberal democracy that characterized the nineteenth and earlier

twentieth centuries to a new era of state and monopoly capitalism — a more advanced capitalist society.

Intellectual Sources: Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud

In producing their critical theory, the Frankfurt School was quite eclectic, drawing on a wide range of figures from a distinctly European cultural tradition focused on characterizing the essential features of the modern age. The Western intellectual tradition — particularly in Europe in the nineteenth century — had attempted to analyze modernity: the modern age, the contemporary era, what was distinctive about it compared to the past. This project began with Hegel and Marx, and the Frankfurt School drew on the dialectical method and the vision of history developed by both.

The dialectical theory saw history as a clash — in Hegel's case, a clash of ideas or cultural forms; in Marx's case, a clash of social classes and ideologies, with class struggle as a central driver of historical change. The Frankfurt School took over this dialectical method that analyzed the tensions and conflicts driving history into new historical stages. From Hegel, they also derived a sense of the power of spirit, of *Geist*, of cultural forms in human and social life, and they deeply respected Hegel's idealism and dialectical method. From Marx, they derived an appreciation for the role of material forces and interests in history, and thus for the role of economics in culture and everyday life. Whereas Hegel stressed the role of ideas and spirit in history and Marx stressed economics and material factors, the Frankfurt School brought both together in their dialectical analysis.

The Frankfurt School was also very strongly influenced by Friedrich Nietzsche, the late-nineteenth-century German philosopher, and

particularly by his critiques of mass culture and society, his critiques of morality, and his critiques of the state and bureaucracy. In works like *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, which he published in installments between 1883 and 1885, Nietzsche denounced the state as "the new idol." He was talking about Bismarck's Germany and the modern states of England and France — states that had become objects of propaganda, celebration, and military display. Nietzsche's critique of the state as a new center of devotion, of course, anticipated German fascism, which idealized the state more than perhaps any society in history. The Frankfurt School was very impressed that Nietzsche had seen this tendency, and they continued his critique of the modern state.

Nietzsche was also one of the first critics of mass culture and massification, and the Frankfurt School is well known for developing this dimension of his critique. Nietzsche decried what he called "mass man" — the conformity of everyone acting and thinking the same way. He was one of the first critics of the role of journalism in creating mass opinion and homogenizing thought and culture. The Frankfurt School extended this line of thought through their studies of film, radio, and later television, which represented an even stronger force of cultural homogenization and massification.

The Frankfurt School also agreed with Nietzsche's critique of Western culture, including his critiques of morality, religion, and conventional philosophy. They agreed that many of these cultural forms served to repress the body. They were, in their way, hedonists and materialists who wanted to emancipate the senses, cultivate free thinking and free spirits, and create a freer way of life. Like Nietzsche, they followed a logic of liberation and tried to develop a philosophy that would lead to the emancipation of human beings.

The Frankfurt School was also deeply influenced by Sigmund Freud, who they believed had deep insights into the role of sexuality in

human life. They pursued an agenda of sexual liberation, most famously in Herbert Marcuse's *Eros and Civilization*, which anticipated the 1960s counterculture in its call to liberate Eros, its celebration of love, and its vision of play and art as emancipatory activities that would cultivate the human senses and create healthier and happier personalities. This had a tremendous influence on the counterculture of the 1960s.

They were also impressed by Freud's theory of the unconscious — the idea that we are often unaware of what causes our behavior, and that unconscious forces frequently govern human life. They took seriously his analysis of the role of the family and socialization in everyday life: problems within the family can create neuroses and trauma that produce personality distortions, and the family plays a very major role in the formation of the individual.

On the other hand, the Frankfurt School were among the first to argue that the family was no longer playing the key role in socialization that Freud and many sociological theorists had attributed to it. They saw that mass culture, mass communication, and the state were playing an increasingly powerful role in socializing the individual, and that the family was declining in importance. They thought this also contributed to a decline of individuality. Whatever its problems or limitations, the dynamics of family interaction — between father and son, among siblings, and so forth — often developed strong individuality, sometimes through revolt against and sometimes through emulation of strong parents. In a society of conformity, where people model themselves on the ideals projected by the mass media and the peer group, individuality was on the decline — and preserving and cultivating individuality in the face of its erosion in contemporary society was one of the major themes of the Frankfurt School.

It was the same with democracy. As the state played a stronger role, and as the media played a stronger role in politics, democracy was on the decline. As people became more interested in consumerism and the consumer society, they became less interested in politics, citizenship, and democratic participation. The Frankfurt School was therefore also eager to renovate and revitalize democracy in the contemporary era. As we will see, this is a major theme for Jürgen Habermas, who made it one of his central concerns.

The *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and the Crisis of Modernity

Critical theory is also very much a historical theory, one that analyzes the changes and developments in history. The Frankfurt School, as I have indicated, analyzed the changes in contemporary capitalist societies from the nineteenth-century capitalism analyzed by Marx through to its contemporary forms. In the 1940s, they concluded that history had continued to evolve in deeply troubling ways, and they developed a new critical analysis of contemporary society. The book by Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, published in 1947, constitutes something of a break and departure from the earlier work I have described, and it provides a completely novel form of philosophy and social theory.

Adorno and Horkheimer had left Columbia University in the early 1940s and gone to California, while Herbert Marcuse, Franz Neumann, and others went to Washington to work for the U.S. government in the fight against fascism. In California, Adorno and Horkheimer attempted to figure out what had happened to contemporary civilization. How had the world degenerated into barbarism? The Enlightenment ideology they had previously followed held that science, industry, technology, and culture would create

progress — that history was moving toward a higher state of human development. But suddenly in the 1930s, with fascism, and in World War II, with barbaric warfare on a mass scale and the slaughter of Jews in concentration camps, it appeared that civilization had collapsed into barbarism.

The frightening analysis that Adorno and Horkheimer produced in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* was that the supposedly highest achievements of Western civilization had turned into their opposites. Reason and Enlightenment were supposed to create freedom, democracy, and a rational society. But the system of technological rationality developed under German fascism had instead created a war machine, concentration camps, and irrational destruction. Reason had been applied to fascism to rationalize the economy: Hitler created the Autobahn system, the trains ran on time, the factories were highly productive. The rationalization of the economy, the state, and culture had produced a war machine and concentration camps. Reason had turned into its opposite.

Whereas science, technology, industry, and rationalization were supposed to create freedom, happiness, and a higher stage of civilization, they had produced their opposites. Indeed, democracy itself had produced its opposite: Mussolini and the fascists had been elected in Italy, and Hitler had been elected initially in Germany. Democracy was supposed to represent the will of the people, guarantee civil liberties, political participation, and individual freedoms. But in the case of German fascism, democracy had turned into totalitarianism. At that moment in history, it could have disappeared from the world entirely had German fascism, Mussolini's Italy, and imperial Japan prevailed.

Likewise, culture was supposed to cultivate more civilized, educated, and humane human beings — that, of course, is what culture is supposed to do. But Adorno and Horkheimer argued that the culture

industry was doing the opposite: making people stupider, crueler, and less humane. The culture industries had taken over culture. Film, radio, television, and journalism had displaced high culture, and rather than cultivating more humane and developed individuals, they were doing the reverse.

So Western civilization had reached a crisis point, according to Adorno and Horkheimer. This was, notably, probably the first critique of modernity and the modern age of science, industry, and technology to emerge from anyone on the left. Previously, Enlightenment liberals like Voltaire and Diderot, early feminists like Mary Wollstonecraft, and socialists like Marx and Lenin had all been modernizers. They believed that developing science, industry, and technology would lead to a higher form of civilization. The critique of modernity had previously come only from the right — from Edmund Burke, Joseph de Maistre, and other conservative critics who affirmed tradition, religion, and the institutions of the past over modernity and the modern age.

But Adorno and Horkheimer described the unintended consequences of the Enlightenment and the modern era: the way science and technology had turned into their opposites, and how what were supposed to be instruments of emancipation and progress had become instruments of domination and destruction. This, of course, anticipated the contemporary postmodern critique that would later challenge modern thought, institutions, technology, and science.

The Frankfurt School therefore argued that reason, culture, and democracy needed to be reconstructed — that new forms were required to save modernity. The next decades of their work were devoted to attempting to overcome the impasse that Western civilization had reached and to create new forms of thought, culture,

and theory that would reverse the trends they had identified in the 1940s.

After World War II: Diverging Paths

After World War II, the Frankfurt School fragmented. Adorno and Horkheimer returned to Germany and continued their work on the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Erich Fromm, Herbert Marcuse, and Leo Lowenthal stayed in the United States and attempted to develop critical theory in new and, I would say, less pessimistic directions than the ones Adorno and Horkheimer had pursued.

Erich Fromm, for instance, published popular and influential books like *Man for Himself* and *The Art of Loving*, in which he was trying to cultivate individuality, morality, and decency, and to fight for democracy and peace. Fromm developed a more positive and constructive version of critical theory that had quite an influence on my generation in the United States. He also wrote widely read books on Freud, on Marx, and on Zen Buddhism. He was politically active, writing against nuclear weapons, opposing the Vietnam War, and supporting efforts for world peace.

It was probably Herbert Marcuse who developed the most optimistic and emancipatory version of critical theory. His book *Eros and Civilization*, published in 1955 — with its vision of the liberation of Eros, its celebration of art and play and the aesthetic dimension, and its critique of technological society — was a major influence on the counterculture and the New Left of the 1960s.

Jürgen Habermas and the Legacy of Critical Theory

Finally, today, Jürgen Habermas has emerged as the most influential contemporary representative of the Frankfurt School. His early work

was done with Adorno and Horkheimer in Frankfurt, where he wrote a book on the origins, development, and later decline of the public sphere, showing how democracy was made possible in the eighteenth century by the rise of newspapers, literary journals, and public spaces where ideas critical of the existing order could be discussed and debated, and where consensus over key issues could be formed through rational deliberation. Habermas eventually turned to a sustained study of language and communication and carried out some very dramatic developments of critical theory. He and his followers remain active today, and critical theory is now influential across the world, with critical theorists in every major country and in virtually every academic discipline, from philosophy and social theory to literary criticism.

Critical theory is, of course, also quite controversial, and there are many critics of the Frankfurt School. But this is all in the spirit of critical theory itself, which sought to cultivate critical thinking, a critical spirit, and a critical analysis of the modern age, providing theories and instruments of emancipatory social change.

The Frankfurt School emerges as one of the most original and creative groups of thinkers of the twentieth century. German Jewish intellectuals who experienced the horrors of German fascism and emigrated to the United States developed searching critiques of contemporary Western civilization. They are important for their interdisciplinary work, combining philosophy and the social sciences, and for their project of developing a critical theory of contemporary society.

Lecture 72: Structuralism, Saussure, and Lévi-Strauss

Professor Louis Markos

Introduction

In this lecture, we shall consider the modern school of structuralism, an interdisciplinary approach to all branches of human knowledge that rejects all ontological and epistemological sources of meaning in favor of an anti-metaphysical approach that posits that all humanistic pursuits are the products of deep structures that predate human consciousness.

Wow, that is a mouthful. As you can imagine, this is going to be a difficult lecture. But if you remember some terminology from earlier lectures in this series, it will not be quite so difficult. You will recall, I hope, that ontology is the study of being, and ontologists are interested in the eternal essences of things. Epistemology, on the other hand, is the study of knowing, and epistemologists focus on our subjective perception of those essences.

Let us begin again. Structuralism breaks with both ontology and epistemology in order to posit a new source and direction for meaning.

Breaking with Ontology and Epistemology

In the beginning of philosophy, ontologists like Plato believed in the real existence of ideas and asserted the transcendent, timeless qualities of those ideas. As you will recall, Plato believed in the Forms. He believed that the ultimate idea — the essence of everything — existed in the heavens. Plato believed that ideas were real things. They had real essence. They were not shadowy, they were

not insubstantial, they were not man-made. They were real truths. And those ideas, those Forms, are the origins of everything in our world.

Well, along comes structuralism in the early part of our century, and structuralism denies that such ideas exist. Metaphysical meaning — both philosophical and theological — does not, for the structuralist, proceed downward from some divine presence, but upward from material structures. The classic embodiment of this central structuralist belief can be found in the work of a proto-structuralist named Karl Marx. Marx argued that religion, philosophy, art, and so forth are not pure vehicles of higher truths, but are products of underlying economic structures. Again, for Marx — who is a sort of father of structuralism — meaning does not start up there and proceed downward. Meaning begins here in our world, with physical, material, socioeconomic forces, and bubbles its way upward. In other words, all things — things like Christianity, democracy, romanticism — are not ideas that descended from the heavens and that we figured out. Christianity, democracy, romanticism: all of those things are products of socioeconomic forces. So Marx breaks with ontology.

What about epistemology? Epistemologists like Kant, although they abandoned Plato's belief in the Forms, replaced it with a belief in the equally transcendent qualities of the subjective mind. In other words, Kant said: perhaps there are no Forms, perhaps there are no eternal essences in the heavens — but he believed that our consciousness is pure. Our subjective consciousness is the source of all meaning and truth. It is a little bit like Descartes' *Cogito*, right? *Cogito ergo sum* — I think, therefore I am. At the center of all meaning and truth for these epistemologists is our consciousness, our self-identity, our ego. That is the source.

Well, structuralism also rejects the subjective self, or ego, as the final source of meaning. Even our individuality, our identity, even our

consciousness is not the origin of anything. It is, once again, the product of material, physical forces.

If the proto-structuralist Marx did away with ontology, it was the proto-structuralist Freud who did away with epistemology. Freud hastened the death of the self as a center or origin of meaning by doing this: Freud showed that it is not the clear, meaningful patterns of our conscious mind, but the deep, hidden structures of our unconscious mind, that determine who we are as individuals. In other words, Freud said that even our consciousness is not the center or origin of our ideas, of meaning and truth, because our conscious mind is itself a product of our unconscious mind. So, between Marx and Freud, we do away with the idea first that the source is from above, and then we do away with the belief that the source is from within. Again, structuralism breaks down the systems of both ontology and epistemology.

Once they do that, of course, it is up to the structuralists to posit a new source for meaning and truth. Meaning and truth do not come from above, nor do they come from within. Rather, they come from below and without. The structuralists believe that the real source of meaning and truth consists of deep structures that are pervasive but hidden throughout society. The real origin is not Plato's Forms; it is not our self-consciousness or our ego. The real source of all meaning and truth is these deep structures. That is why we call them structuralists: because they believe that the source of everything is structure.

Obviously I need to spend some time telling you what a structure is. What I would like to do now is define for you five qualities of a structure. Once we have done that, we can move on and look at the actual systems of the structuralists themselves.

Five Qualities of a Structure

First, structures are unconscious rather than conscious, material rather than metaphysical, deterministic rather than humanistic. Remember Freud: the origin is not our conscious mind but our unconscious mind. Remember Karl Marx: the origin is not some metaphysical, supernatural idea; it is material forces — for Marx, socioeconomic forces. But in either case, it is the material, unconscious forces that produce the metaphysical, conscious ones, and not vice versa.

Deterministic rather than humanistic: again, we are not the makers of our own destiny. We — and our beliefs and our ideas and everything about us — are determined by these structures. As many of you know, the systems of both Freud and Marx are deterministic. We have no control. We are products. We do not make our destiny; destiny makes us, in the guise of these structures.

The clearest example of this can be seen in the structure of language itself. When we speak, write, or even think, the structuralists say, our words do not come to us via revelation. Rather, they are products of an objective, scientific, linguistic structure that determines the meanings of our words and thoughts. For a structuralist, language determines thought, and not vice versa. They believe that language, so to speak, ventriloquizes us. The vast, unconscious, deterministic structure of language produces our thoughts and our ideas. For Marx and Freud, as we saw above, vast patterns of economic forces — for Marx — and unconscious motivations — for Freud — function as structures that determine the ideology of the state, for Marx, or the ego of the citizen, for Freud. So once again, these structures are materialistic, they are unconscious, and they are deterministic.

Second, structures are not founded on things — on elements that have meaning in and of themselves — but on relations between

things. Structural meaning arises out of the differences between the constituent parts. In other words, the individual elements that make up the structure are not important in and of themselves. They have no meaning on their own. It is only when you arrange those things in a system or structure of differences that you have a structure capable of determining meaning.

Let me give you two very concrete examples. Most of you have probably listened to a compact disc. Do you know what a compact disc works on? It works on what is called binary code. Every bit of information on your compact disc is encoded as either a one or a zero. But the ones and the zeros have no meaning in and of themselves. A one, a zero — that is nothing. But when you take those ones and zeros and string them together in a system of differences — one is not zero, zero is not one — when you string them out in a system of differences, voilà, they produce a complex symphony. Again, the one and the zero are nothing on their own; meaning comes only from the structure of differences.

Let me give you another, more radical and more metaphysical example. I am a product of my DNA, right? My DNA is a kind of structure. My DNA, as some of you know, is formed of four bases abbreviated C, A, T, and G. But the individual C, A, T, and G have no meaning in and of themselves. Yet when you string together the C, A, T, and G in a system of differences, voilà — you produce a living, breathing, conscious human being. So again, the individual elements are not important. It is only when they are placed in a structure or system of differences that meaning emerges.

Third, structures are complete, logical, and all-encompassing. Every element of the structure can be systematically plotted along the horizontal and vertical axes of the Cartesian coordinate system. Now, you all remember this from high school: the Cartesian coordinate system is that large cross — one vertical line and a horizontal line

that bisects it — with four quadrants in which you can plot all sorts of mathematical points, curves, and so forth. Well, structures are mathematical and logical. Every element can be literally plotted on that Cartesian coordinate system, and you can see not only the elements but the relationships between them. Structures, again, are mathematical. We are coming from science here, rather than from the humanities.

Fourth, structures are not static but dynamic. They are constantly transforming themselves, spiraling outward to form new elements and relations that can in turn be plotted on the coordinate system. You may have thought, from the way I have described them, that structures are static — but no, structures do change over time. Usually it is a slow change, but they are dynamic, they do change. And yet each time the elements and their relationships change, the structure can still be plotted systematically, logically, and mathematically on the Cartesian coordinate system. It maintains itself as a mathematical structure, but that structure can evolve from era to era, age to age.

Fifth and finally, structures are found in all areas of thought and study, from history to linguistics, psychology to anthropology. Structuralism as a method is interdisciplinary — it crosses all disciplinary boundaries. And structuralism seeks to refound even the humanities on a more objective, scientific basis.

Now, a lot of you may not have realized this, but let me give you an example of how structuralism has impacted the academy. A hundred years ago, history was considered one of the humanities, and I believe that is where it belongs. But today, what is it? A social science. Psychology, which I believe also should be a humanity — or at least a social science — is now often classified as a natural science. What is happening? All of our disciplines — and I think this is regrettable — are gravitating toward science. It is almost as if we

want to take the human element out of the humanities. But remember: structuralism is deterministic rather than humanistic. It wants to take all the disciplines — including the humanities, theology, literature, all of them — and refound them, turn them into something mathematical, logical, and scientific. So whether you realize it or not, structuralism has had a profound impact on the academy and the way we look at our disciplines. It is changing somewhat now, but through most of our century that movement toward the scientific, the logical, the mathematical, and the structural has been a powerful force.

Ferdinand de Saussure and the Origins of Linguistic Structuralism

All right. I hope you now have a good idea of what structures are. Let us move on and talk about the work of the structuralists themselves. I have mentioned Freud and Marx, but as I said earlier, they are really proto-structuralists. Structuralism as a method originates in the linguistic studies of Ferdinand de Saussure, as elaborated in his work *Course in General Linguistics*, published in 1916. Early in our century, Saussure — a linguist — effectively begins structuralism. How did he do it?

According to Saussure, no ready-made ideas exist before words. Let me explain. For Plato, behind our word *beauty* is the Form or idea of beauty that exists in the heavens. In other words, Plato believed that all our words have an origin, and most of us, when we speak, share this illusion that our words mean something — that they are not arbitrary, that they are linked to some kind of Idea with a capital I.

Not so for Saussure. For Saussure, a word — what he calls a *sign* — does not unite some pre-existent thing-in-itself with some perfect name. Rather, a word or sign links a concept, which he calls the

signified, with a sound or image, which he calls the *signifier*. In other words, when I say the word *tree*, I am not trying to embody the essence of Tree-ness — Tree with a capital T. What I am doing is simply looking at a regular old tree with a small t and attaching a sound to it: *tree*, T-R-E-E. That is all the word is — just some letters and sounds we affix to a concept. There is nothing mystical about it; there is no language of Adam. Remember the Book of Genesis: God made the animals pass before Adam, and Adam gave them names, and there is this belief that Adam gave each animal a name that captured its very essence. No — that is not what language is. Language is just a word, an image, a sound.

Not only that, but Saussure says the relationship between the signified and the signifier is *arbitrary*. What is his proof? If it were not arbitrary, there would be only one language in the world. What makes the English word for *tree* any closer to truth or meaning than the French word, or the Spanish word, or the Chinese word? Our words are arbitrary. We want to think that our words have meaning and essence, that they capture truth — but no, words are just arbitrary. The Bible's explanation for the multiplicity of languages, of course, is the Tower of Babel: language was once pure, but it has fallen as we have. For Saussure, however, that multiplicity simply reveals the essential arbitrariness of language itself.

To repeat: neither Platonic Forms nor transcendent truths lurk behind the words we use. Words or signs are merely arbitrary, man-made concepts.

Now let us go further, because Saussure is not really interested in individual signs alone. Remember: in a structure, a sign on its own has no meaning. It only has meaning as part of a system. The meaning of words or signs, Saussure says, emerges out of the differences that set them apart from other signs within the overarching system or structure. Even a simple sign like *cat* — C-A-T

— has no meaning in and of itself. *CAT* only has meaning because *CAT* is not *BAT* or *CAN*. Individual words are not only arbitrary; they have no meaning in and of themselves. They only acquire meaning when placed in a system or structure of differences.

As a structuralist, Saussure believes that the overarching linguistic structure stretches out both vertically and horizontally, like the first quadrant of a Cartesian coordinate system. He believes he can, in principle, plot all of language on a graph, both vertically and horizontally.

Saussure calls this structure — this structure that lies deeper than thought and that produces our ideas — the *langue* (L-A-N-G-U-E), and he distinguishes the *langue* from *parole*. *Parole* is a specific instance of speech or writing. Crucially, Saussure is not really interested in *parole*. He is not interested in individual words or statements. He is interested in the *langue* — in the structure itself, and in how the structure produces the *parole*.

Let me give you two more important pieces of Saussure's terminology. He used distinct terms to define vertical meaning and horizontal meaning. Vertical meaning, Saussure says, is *synchronic* — from the Greek, meaning "with time." Synchronic meaning is concerned with how each sign interacts with the existing structure: it freezes the system and examines how each sign is differentiated from other signs within that system of differences. Horizontal meaning, on the other hand, is *diachronic* — from the Greek, meaning "through time." Diachronic meaning is concerned with the evolution of the structure through time, that is, with how the system or structure changes from era to era.

Some thinkers, like Marx, are diachronic — they are interested in historical change. But Saussure, like most of the structuralists, is interested not in diachronic meaning but in synchronic meaning. He

wants to freeze the system and look at it vertically, to see how it works.

Roman Jakobson and the Phoneme

All right — that is Saussure, the founder of the modern school of structuralism. Structuralism was later refined, however, not by a linguist but by an anthropologist named Claude Lévi-Strauss. Lévi-Strauss did not encounter Saussure's work directly; he came to Saussure's ideas secondhand through another linguist named Roman Jakobson. Jakobson was, in a sense, a disciple of Saussure, and he took Saussure even further.

Following Saussure, Roman Jakobson broke language down into even smaller units, which he called *phonemes*. What is a phoneme? A phoneme is an individual vowel or consonant sound. In other words, if a sign is C-A-T, a phoneme is the C sound, or the A sound, or the T sound by itself. Jakobson broke language down into even smaller building blocks — and structuralists, it should be said, have a fondness for small building blocks.

Jakobson argued that all language — and thus all thought — is composed of these phonemes, but that the phonemes have no meaning in and of themselves. Like the C, A, T, and G of our DNA, the phonemes by themselves are meaningless. They only have meaning — as you could perhaps say along with me by now — when they are placed in a system or structure of differences.

Claude Lévi-Strauss and Structural Anthropology

With that as a preface, let us turn to Lévi-Strauss.

Building on Jakobson's concept of the phoneme, Lévi-Strauss — the anthropologist — posited that complex mythic structures are

composed not of phonemes but of *mythemes*. What is a mytheme? A mytheme is an individual unit whose meaning arises solely from difference and structure.

Thus, argues Lévi-Strauss, mythic archetypes — like the sun, to which traditional anthropologists attempt to affix stable meanings — are in fact not possessed of any inherent cross-cultural significance. Their meaning shifts each time they are used in a different mythic structure. Let me explain. Traditional anthropologists like Sir James Frazer, or Joseph Campbell, or even Carl Jung — who has an anthropological dimension to his thought — believe that archetypes like the sun, the quest, or water have a fixed meaning cross-culturally: they mean just about the same thing whether you go to Africa, India, or South America. Lévi-Strauss, the structuralist, says no. Each mytheme, each archetype, only has meaning within a system of differences. The meaning of the mytheme therefore changes as you move from culture to culture, from structure to structure. The archetype is not a source of meaning — that would be an ontological claim. The archetype is simply one more element placed within a system of differences.

Now, Lévi-Strauss interprets myths by critically analyzing their deep structures. Just as Saussure arranges each sign of a given linguistic system into a complex overarching *langue*, so Lévi-Strauss arranges each element of a myth so that it can be read both horizontally and vertically. He too plots his myths on the Cartesian coordinate system.

Let me give you the example that Lévi-Strauss himself uses. He employs the analogy of a pack of playing cards. Let us say you take a pack of cards and arrange it in four horizontal columns. In column one, you have all the hearts, beginning with the ace of hearts and moving through to the king of hearts. Column two has the spades, from ace to king, and you do the same for the diamonds and the

clubs. What you end up with is a structure composed of four horizontal columns with thirteen elements in each column.

Now, most people will interpret those cards diachronically — that is, they will read left to right: column one, then column two, column three, and column four. But Lévi-Strauss tells us there is another way to read those cards. What if, instead of paying attention to the horizontal columns, we look at the vertical rows? That card structure is also composed of thirteen vertical rows, each row containing the same card in four different suits. When you do that, you are thinking like a structuralist. When we begin to read those cards synchronically, something significant happens. We begin to notice the hidden structure that underlies the system. We see its subconscious patterns of sameness and difference. We start to see it as a structure.

Let me give you my own example: a structural reading of the Book of Genesis. Most people read Genesis diachronically, as three horizontal columns. First comes the story of Abraham and his family. The next column is the story of Isaac and his family. The third column is the story of Jacob and his family, leading on to Joseph. Most of us read Genesis that way — diachronically. But what if we start thinking like a structuralist? What if we begin reading Genesis synchronically, paying attention not to the horizontal columns but to the vertical rows? When we do that, something remarkable emerges. Reading vertically, you notice that Genesis is obsessed with doubling. Abraham has two wives — or rather, a wife and a concubine: Sarah and Hagar. Then Isaac comes along: Isaac has only one wife, Rebekah, but his wife gives birth to twin boys, Jacob and Esau. Then we come to Jacob: Jacob has two wives and two concubines, and his two favorite sons — Benjamin and Joseph — are the two sons of his second wife. You do not notice that pattern until you read synchronically and attend to the structure.

One more example. If you read Genesis synchronically, you will notice a persistent element or theme of younger sons who supplant their older brothers. Isaac overthrows his older brother Ishmael in terms of receiving the blessing. Then Jacob overthrows Esau. And finally, Joseph overthrows Reuben and all of his other older brothers. Again, you do not notice these things until you read vertically, synchronically, like a structuralist.

Now, the mythic structures that Lévi-Strauss traces in his many works are very wide in scope. They encompass not only tales of heroes, but economic and mercantile realities, incest taboos, and the everyday rituals of cooking and eating. Personally, I am most interested in his structures of myth and heroes — and most people are. But these other dimensions are fascinating as well. What Lévi-Strauss shows is that there is a structure to every element of any given society, and that he can plot it all on his graph.

Two Ironies of Structuralism

Finally, in closing, I would like to run by you two ironies of structuralism.

First, although the structuralists insist that meaning is not a product of human desire, their near obsession with organizing all thought and practice into a universal system betrays a traditional metaphysical desire for order. In other words, they say: our desires do not produce structures — structures produce our desires. And yet the structuralists themselves harbor a very deep desire to find mathematical, systematic structure everywhere. And so I would argue that it is not the structure that creates their desire, but their desire that creates the structure. Perhaps they are not as radical as they think. That is irony number one.

Second, as Jacques Derrida — the post-structuralist — will show, the structuralist rejection of all ontological and epistemological centers is followed by their own positing of structure as a new center. The structuralists say: we want to break away from all origins, all centers — no ontology, no epistemology. But what have they done? They have turned structure itself into a new center. What Derrida is saying is that the structuralists are not as radical as they would like to believe. They are still thinking like traditional metaphysicians. They have a new center, but they still have a center. And so, once again, the structuralists are not so radical as they would like to believe.

Coda to Part VI: The Fragmentation of Certainty

If Part V chronicled the rise of grand intellectual systems, Part VI has explored what happened when confidence in those systems began to erode. The nineteenth century produced ambitious visions of history, society, morality, and human destiny. By contrast, the twentieth century increasingly became an age of suspicion, analysis, and self-examination. The thinkers gathered in this section did not necessarily reject the achievements of their predecessors, but they questioned whether the comprehensive frameworks that had once promised certainty could bear the weight placed upon them.

The result was one of the most creative and intellectually diverse periods in the history of philosophy.

What unites the otherwise disparate movements of Part VI is a growing recognition that many of the assumptions underlying modern thought are less secure than they appear. The nineteenth century often believed that reality could be explained through a single master narrative, whether grounded in reason, history, science, economics, or progress. Twentieth-century philosophers became increasingly skeptical of such ambitions. Rather than constructing vast systems, they turned their attention to the foundations of thought itself.

They began asking different questions.

How does consciousness encounter the world? How does language shape meaning? What hidden motives influence human behavior? Can objective knowledge ever escape the perspective of the knower? What becomes of morality when traditional foundations weaken? How should human beings live in a world that offers no guaranteed answers?

These questions transformed philosophy.

The emergence of psychoanalysis challenged the Enlightenment image of the rational individual. Freud revealed a self divided against itself, influenced by unconscious desires, conflicts, and motivations that remain partially hidden from conscious awareness. The human mind appeared less transparent and less autonomous than earlier generations had assumed. Rationality remained important, but it was no longer sovereign.

Phenomenology represented another attempt to rethink the foundations of inquiry. Husserl sought to return philosophy to immediate experience itself, setting aside assumptions about the external world in order to investigate how meaning arises within consciousness. His project inspired an entire tradition of philosophical reflection concerned with lived experience rather than abstract systems.

Existentialism carried these concerns into the realm of human freedom and responsibility. Thinkers such as Heidegger, Sartre, and Camus explored what it means to exist in a world where certainty is elusive and meaning cannot simply be inherited from tradition. Human beings are not passive spectators observing reality from a distance. They are participants who must make choices, accept responsibility, and confront the anxieties that accompany freedom.

At the same time, a very different intellectual movement emerged within the analytic tradition. Philosophers increasingly turned toward logic, language, and conceptual analysis. Rather than seeking comprehensive metaphysical systems, they examined the structure of propositions, the meaning of words, and the conditions under which claims can be considered meaningful or true. Language itself became a central philosophical concern.

What is striking about these developments is that they often moved in opposite directions while sharing a common motivation. Some philosophers explored subjective experience. Others analyzed formal

logic. Some examined culture and history. Others investigated language and science. Yet all were responding to a shared realization: the apparent certainties of earlier centuries had fractured.

This fragmentation was not necessarily a defeat. In many respects, it represented intellectual maturity. The willingness to recognize complexity, ambiguity, and limitation often produced richer and more nuanced forms of inquiry. Twentieth-century philosophy became less interested in final answers and more interested in understanding the conditions under which questions arise.

Yet fragmentation carries costs as well.

As the century progressed, it became increasingly difficult to sustain a unified intellectual culture. The disciplines multiplied. Specialization expanded. Philosophers often disagreed not merely about answers but about what counted as a legitimate question. Competing schools developed distinct vocabularies, methods, and assumptions. The dream of a common framework appeared increasingly remote.

At the same time, history itself was placing unprecedented pressure on inherited ideas.

The twentieth century witnessed events that challenged every optimistic narrative inherited from the Enlightenment and the nineteenth century. Two world wars devastated Europe. Totalitarian regimes emerged. Genocide revealed the depths of human cruelty. Nuclear weapons introduced the possibility of global annihilation. Technological progress accelerated while moral confidence weakened. Scientific achievement reached astonishing heights even as humanity demonstrated an unparalleled capacity for destruction.

These historical realities form the background of the next stage of our journey.

Part VII, *The Crises of Modernity*, asks whether the modern project itself can survive the challenges it has created. The questions are no

longer merely philosophical in the traditional sense. They are civilizational. Can reason still provide a foundation for political life? Can science continue to serve as a source of progress without becoming a source of domination? Can democratic societies preserve freedom amid growing complexity and bureaucracy? Can moral judgment survive in a culture increasingly aware of the contingency of its own values?

The thinkers awaiting us in the final part of the course will offer very different answers. Some will defend the Enlightenment and seek to reform its institutions. Others will challenge its assumptions. Some will recover older traditions. Others will embrace pluralism, contingency, and uncertainty. Hayek, Rawls, Habermas, Popper, Kuhn, Quine, Derrida, Rorty, Gouldner, and MacIntyre will engage in one of the most consequential debates in modern intellectual history.

The story that began with the Pre-Socratics asking what the world is made of now arrives at a different question: what kind of civilization can human beings sustain once they have become aware of the limits of their own certainty?

Part VI leaves us standing at that threshold. The search for truth continues, but it now proceeds with a heightened awareness of history, language, power, perspective, and human fallibility. The final part of the course will explore what becomes of the Western intellectual tradition when it turns those critical tools upon itself.

Part VII: The Crises of Modernity

Preamble

Every intellectual tradition eventually turns its sharpest instruments against itself. The Western philosophical tradition had spent the better part of three centuries building the case for scientific rationality, individual rights, democratic self-governance, and the progressive improvement of human life through the application of reason to social problems. Part VII represents the moment when that tradition, shaken by the catastrophes of the first half of the twentieth century and unsettled by the accelerating transformations of the second, began to ask whether the project it had been advancing was coherent, whether it was achievable, and whether — in some of its most disturbing manifestations — it might actually be part of the problem rather than the solution. The twelve lectures gathered here do not constitute a refutation of the Enlightenment, but they are something more searching than a defense of it: they are a sustained and multifaceted cross-examination, conducted by thinkers who take modernity seriously enough to argue about it with genuine urgency.

The introductory lecture establishes the historical context with the necessary sobriety. The post-war decades were not, by the reckoning of most people who lived through them, an era of despair — standards of living rose, life expectancies improved, new democracies emerged, old empires dissolved. Yet the period was also pervaded by anxiety of a peculiar kind, an anxiety rooted not in the failure of modern institutions but in their success, or rather in what that success had revealed about their ambiguity. The same scientific rationality that produced penicillin and the Green Revolution also produced napalm and the hydrogen bomb. The same industrial capitalism that generated the consumer society also generated an intensification of labor that left people feeling they were running

faster merely to stay in place. The same communications revolution that democratized information also created new instruments of manipulation, spectacle, and manufactured consent that the Frankfurt School had already identified in their gloomiest analyses. And the same academic expansion that multiplied human knowledge also fragmented it, creating a world in which specialists knew ever more about ever less, and in which no single mind could hope to hold the whole in view. The modernist confidence that these tensions could be resolved — that science, democracy, and rational planning would eventually converge on a better world — had been badly damaged by Auschwitz and Hiroshima, and it could not simply be restored by pointing to economic growth rates.

The political strand of the crises of modernity generates the largest cluster of lectures, and it manifests in a fundamental tension that the introductory lecture identifies with unusual clarity: the tension between the Enlightenment's theory of politics, which was framed in terms of natural rights, social contracts, and legislative sovereignty, and the actual practice of the modern state, which had become administrative, regulatory, redistributive, and deeply entangled in the management of economic life in ways that none of the Founding documents had explicitly authorized. Three strategies of response to this tension are traced across the lectures, and the word strategy is apt, because each represents not merely a philosophical position but a way of inhabiting the intellectual inheritance of modernity.

Hayek represents the conservative strategy in its most intellectually rigorous form, and the lecture on his work is particularly valuable for refusing the caricature. He is not simply a defender of laissez-faire capitalism or a champion of the wealthy. He is a theorist of knowledge, and his critique of central planning rests ultimately on a claim about what human beings can and cannot know. The division of labor that Adam Smith had celebrated as the mechanism of

prosperity has, Hayek argues, an epistemic counterpart: a social division of knowledge, dispersed among millions of individuals in forms that are often tacit, situational, and fundamentally inarticulate — knowledge that cannot be collected, centralized, or acted upon by any planning authority, however benevolent or well-equipped with computers. Markets are not merely efficient allocators of resources in the standard economist's sense; they are mechanisms for aggregating and transmitting this diffuse and embodied knowledge in the form of prices, which serve as signals that coordinate the decisions of actors who know nothing of each other's circumstances. To replace markets with central planning is therefore not merely inefficient but epistemically incoherent — it destroys the very mechanism through which the knowledge needed for rational economic decision-making is generated and communicated. The Road to Serfdom extends this argument in a political direction, tracing what Hayek saw as the likely trajectory from planning to authoritarianism not as a prediction of inevitable disaster but as a diagnosis of structural tendencies. And his concept of the rule of law — law that is general, equally applicable to government and citizens alike, and not retrospective — offers a normative standard that separates legitimate governance from administrative arbitrariness. What is easy to underestimate in the lecture's account is how much Hayek shares with his opponents: his early sympathy with socialist ideals, his acknowledgment that markets produce imperfect and sometimes undeserved distributions, his support for a welfare safety net, his deep concern for individual freedom grounded not in property rights as such but in the fear of concentrated power. He is not against the state; he is against the illusion that the state can be omniscient.

Nozick approaches the same conservative critique from a different angle, and the lecture on his work offers an unusually honest account of both its intellectual strengths and its undefended premises. Where

Hayek grounds his argument in epistemology and political economy, Nozick grounds his in rights — the kind of rights that Locke and Jefferson invoked, individual and pre-political, constituting constraints on what any person or group may do to another without consent. Starting from a Lockean state of nature, he constructs what is philosophically the most careful argument in the libertarian tradition for the emergence of a minimal state without rights violations, and what is philosophically the most direct attack on the legitimacy of the redistributive welfare state. His tale of the slave, his invocation of self-ownership and the analogy of taxation to forced labor, his Wilt Chamberlain argument against pattern theories of distributive justice — all of these are presented in the lecture as the provocations they were meant to be, and the lecture is right to distinguish their genuine force from the undefended assumptions on which they ultimately rest. Nozick himself later distanced himself from the work, without ever fully explaining his reservations. What the lecture rightly identifies as the most neglected section of Anarchy, State, and Utopia — the utopia section, with its vision of a framework within which diverse communities could pursue radically different conceptions of the good life — gestures toward something more interesting than the book's reputation as a libertarian manifesto: a genuine pluralism about human flourishing that is more hospitable than either the Rawlsian or the socialist alternatives to the genuine diversity of human values.

Rawls represents the liberal strategy, and his Theory of Justice is the most ambitious attempt in twentieth-century political philosophy to give philosophical foundations to the practices of constitutional social democracy. The lecture on his work is careful to locate him in the tradition he consciously draws on: social contractarianism from Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau, and Kantian universalism as the source of his insistence that the principles of justice must be derivable by purely rational agents uncontaminated by knowledge of

their own interests and social positions. The original position and the veil of ignorance are not merely rhetorical devices; they are a way of operationalizing the Kantian ideal of moral legislation that is genuinely universal, not merely the expression of particular interests dressed up in the language of principle. The two principles that emerge from this procedure — maximal equal liberty for all, and the requirement that social and economic inequalities benefit the least advantaged — represent, as the lecture notes, a systematic attempt to give content to the revolutionary triad of liberty, equality, and fraternity, with the difference principle supplying the philosophical substance of fraternity that the tradition had always honored in rhetoric and ignored in theory. The lecture is appropriately honest about the difficulties: the assumption of a univocal rationality that would generate consensus among parties who know nothing of their own values; the possibility that different but equally coherent theories of social science would lead rational parties to endorse very different institutional arrangements; and the ahistorical character of principles that are meant to be universal but may in fact reflect the particular moral intuitions of a liberal North Atlantic culture of the mid-twentieth century.

Habermas occupies a distinctive position in this landscape, at once a descendant of the Frankfurt School's critical theory and a defender of the Enlightenment against what he sees as the nihilism of poststructuralism and deconstruction. The lecture on his work traces the development of his thought from the structural analysis of the public sphere — that space of rational public discourse between the state and private life that he saw as constitutive of genuine democracy and whose erosion under the combined pressure of corporate media and consumer culture he traced with both historical precision and political urgency — to the theory of communicative action that became the philosophical foundation of his mature work. The insight that language itself, simply as a medium of genuine

communication rather than manipulation, contains normative ideals — ideals of mutuality, of rational responsiveness to the force of better arguments, of a commitment to understanding rather than domination — is among the most original contributions to political philosophy of the period. It is Habermas's way of grounding the Enlightenment's political values not in a God's-eye view of natural rights or a hypothetical original position, but in the very structure of the human practice of talking seriously with one another. That he was aware of the distance between this ideal and the actual practice of democracy dominated by spin doctors, advertising, and the manufactured image gives the theory a critical rather than merely apologetic function: the ideal speech situation serves as a standard against which existing communicative practices can be measured and found wanting.

The philosophy of science strand of Part VII is equally rich and runs in a quite different direction from the political strand. Popper, Kuhn, and Quine form a kind of conversation with each other that has shaped how philosophy of science has been practiced for decades, and the three lectures presenting them can be read as a progressive complication of the Enlightenment's confidence in scientific rationality. Popper's contribution, as the lecture presents it, is not to undermine that confidence but to deepen and honest it. The lesson he drew from the Einstein-Newton episode — that even the best-confirmed scientific theory may turn out to be wrong, and that this vulnerability is not a defect of science but its very strength — is one of those insights that seems obvious once stated but that took enormous intellectual courage to insist on in the face of both the positivist tradition's desire for certainty and the commonsense assumption that science builds securely on verified foundations. Science progresses not by accumulating proven truths but by exposing its conjectures to the most severe criticism available, and by replacing theories that fail that test with better ones. The

connection between this epistemology and his political philosophy — the defense of the open society against what he called historicism and totalitarianism — is not accidental. The same fallibilism and intersubjective criticism that characterizes good science should, on Popper's view, characterize good politics: institutional arrangements that make it possible to remove bad leaders without violence, to correct bad policies without revolution, to learn from our mistakes rather than dying with them like the frog surrounded by motionless flies.

Kuhn complicates this picture in ways that the lecture presents with genuine care for the controversy they generated. His account of normal science — the relatively dogmatic, puzzle-solving activity within an established paradigm that characterizes most scientific work most of the time — is not a critique of science but an accurate phenomenology of how science actually operates. The problem, which the reception history makes clear, is that his account of scientific revolutions seems to undermine the possibility of rational choice between paradigms, since paradigms, on his view, are not merely different theories but different ways of seeing the world, different conceptual frameworks that constitute what count as problems, solutions, and evidence. The gestalt-switch metaphor implies that there is no neutral standpoint from which to adjudicate between competing paradigms, and the notion of incommensurability seemed to open the door to a relativism about scientific knowledge that Kuhn himself repudiated but could never quite close. The lecture wisely refuses to adjudicate the debate between those who see Kuhn's work as a liberating sociological realism and those who see it as a threat to scientific rationality, finding instead that the tension between his descriptive and normative commitments points toward genuinely open questions about the relationship between the sociology and the epistemology of science that remain unresolved.

Quine takes the analysis further in a direction that is at once more technical and more radical in its implications. By attacking the dogmas of empiricism — the analytic-synthetic distinction and the doctrine of reductionism — and by developing his thesis of ontological relativity through the thought experiment of radical translation, he arrives at a position in which no sentence in any language or theory has its meaning and reference fully determined, in which the very framework we use to describe what our theories are about is always relative to the background language we happen to be using, and in which the boundary between logic and empirical science, between necessity and contingency, dissolves. Yet Quine is not a skeptic or a nihilist. He emerges, rather, as a thoroughgoing pragmatist and naturalist, for whom the appropriate response to the underdetermination of our theories by evidence is not despair but the kind of tolerance for theoretical alternatives that has always characterized good scientific thinking. His project of epistemology naturalized — studying how human beings, as natural organisms, build up their theories from the impingement of sensory stimuli — represents a genuinely different vision of what philosophy should be doing: not legislating from above what counts as knowledge, but participating alongside the sciences in the ongoing project of understanding how a particular species manages to know the world it inhabits.

Derrida's deconstruction and Rorty's neopragmatism occupy the more radical end of Part VII's spectrum, and the two lectures presenting them make a natural pair, since Marcos's lecture on Derrida describes the target that Rorty partly shares and partly refutes. Derrida's genealogy of logocentrism — the Western philosophical tradition's recurring desire for an originary presence, a transcendental signified that would anchor the play of meaning and guarantee the stability of truth — is presented here as the most sustained and systematic attack on the metaphysical tradition since

Nietzsche. The identification of Nietzsche, Freud, and Heidegger as his intellectual forerunners places deconstruction in the context of the broader twentieth-century critique of the Enlightenment's faith in transparent reason and stable meaning. The lecture's two closing observations — that deconstruction, in eliminating all centers, simply installs structure as a new center, and that the structuralists' obsession with finding universal mathematical order everywhere betrays a deeply metaphysical desire for exactly the kind of ground they claim to have abandoned — are among the most penetrating critical observations in the entire course. The lecture is also admirably honest about what is genuinely liberating in Derrida's vision, whatever one thinks of its metaphysical commitments: the affirmation of free play, the refusal to be imprisoned by any fixed system of meaning, the embrace of what Nietzsche called the innocence of becoming.

Rorty takes much of what is useful in Derrida while refusing its more nihilistic implications. His Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature offers a genealogy of epistemologically centered philosophy as a specifically modern project, rooted in the Cartesian-Lockean image of the mind as a medium of representation whose accuracy could be assessed by philosophy as a first discipline. By showing that this project has generated not cumulative knowledge but an endless series of insoluble pseudo-problems, Rorty clears the ground for a different way of thinking about what philosophy should be doing. His pragmatism — drawing on Dewey, Wittgenstein, Sellars, Davidson, and Quine — proposes that we abandon the quest for truth as correspondence and replace it with truth as what is good in the way of belief, where good is assessed by reference to the practical, social, and epistemic purposes our beliefs serve. Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity offers his positive alternative: a philosophical culture organized around the values of democratic pluralism, the cultivation of individual self-creation and authenticity,

and the expansion of solidarity through an imaginative identification with the suffering of others, an expansion that owes more to literature than to philosophical argument. His concept of the liberal ironist — a person who holds their final vocabulary with appropriate humility, knowing it is contingent and might be otherwise, while still being capable of moral seriousness and political commitment — is one of the most attractive philosophical self-descriptions to emerge from late twentieth-century thought, even if it raises questions about the grounds of the values it takes as given.

The two most unexpected figures in Part VII are Guldner and MacIntyre, and the lectures on them are among the most intellectually adventurous in the entire course. Guldner's dark side of the dialectic is presented here as a kind of Socratic outlaw Marxism, an application of Marx's own methods of ideology critique to Marxism itself. By tracing the emergence of ideology to the modern culture of rational discourse and its dependence on the new print media of the early nineteenth century, by identifying the real class struggle of the modern epoch as between the moneyed old class and the new class of technical intelligentsia and humanistic intellectuals, and by excavating the nightmare Marxism hidden within the anomalies of Marx's own research program — the troubling signs that private property might be a necessary condition of the dynamic capitalism that could solve the problem of scarcity, and that the state might be an independent power rather than a mere superstructural epiphenomenon — Guldner transforms both Marxism and our understanding of who actually drives historical change. His conclusion that the new class, despite its platonic complex and its inordinate will to power, might still be the best card history has left to play represents a characteristic Guldnerian move: a gesture of qualified, ironic hope in the face of a thoroughly disenchanted analysis.

MacIntyre's After Virtue and its subsequent development represent perhaps the most ambitious attempt in the period to reconstruct a coherent moral philosophy from the ruins of the Enlightenment project's failure. His diagnosis of modern moral discourse as incoherent — as consisting of fragments of older moral traditions that have been stripped of the teleological context that gave them their meaning — connects the meta-ethical impasse around the is-ought gap to a much broader historical story about what Enlightenment modernity did to the moral inheritance it received. His recovery of Aristotelian virtue ethics and the concept of social practices is not a nostalgic conservatism but a genuine philosophical argument: that moral rationality requires a tradition within which the goods internal to practices can be identified, cultivated, and argued about, and that the Enlightenment's claim to have transcended tradition was always self-defeating because modernity is itself a tradition, and a notably confused one. The lecture's treatment of his approach to the rationality of traditions — his engagement with Kuhn and Lakatos, his non-relativist account of how traditions can learn from each other without requiring a neutral standpoint above them all — shows how sophisticated his response to the challenge of relativism actually is. Whether that response succeeds in establishing Thomistic Catholicism as the rational victor in the contest between traditions is a question the lecture wisely leaves open.

What emerges from Part VII as a whole is a portrait of a philosophical culture that has lost the easy confidence of the Enlightenment without having found anything to replace it, and that has responded to this situation with an extraordinary variety of intellectual strategies, from Popper's fallibilist defense of reason and democracy to Derrida's affirmation of free play, from Rawls's neo-Kantian reconstruction of social justice to Hayek's neo-Hayekian reconstruction of spontaneous order, from MacIntyre's neo-Aristotelian recovery of virtue to Rorty's neo-pragmatist dissolution

of the very questions that had obsessed the tradition. What virtually all of these thinkers share, despite their profound disagreements, is an awareness that the crises of modernity cannot be resolved simply by returning to pre-modern certainties or by accelerating the modernist program with greater determination. They are living with a tradition that has become, as the introductory lecture notes, inescapable even for those who most fervently wish to escape it. The critics of the Enlightenment cannot argue their case without employing the very rationality they are criticizing. The defenders of modernity cannot ignore the accumulated evidence of what that modernity has wrought. Part VII is the record of what serious thinkers look like when they refuse to flinch from that predicament.

Lecture 73: Introduction

Professor Darren Staloff

Philosophy in the latter half of the twentieth century was written in the context of accelerating and often deeply disturbing changes in Western society, politics, and culture. Coupled with the devastating wars and atrocities of the first half of the century, some of these changes led many philosophers to re-examine the value of the entire modern philosophical project itself. In particular, we are going to examine two critical issues that philosophers came to re-examine: one being the theory and practice of modern politics, and the second, the value of scientific rationality.

But first, let us begin by examining some of the historical developments and changes that set the context for this re-evaluation. These are changes that produced no small amount of anxiety, as well as a growing awareness of the very fractures and contradictions within the project of modernity itself. And in particular, we are going to look at these changes in three realms: the realms of politics, of the economy, and of culture and information.

The Realm of Politics

First, in the realm of politics. Coming hard on the heels of the Second World War, the very heart of Europe was divided by a new bipolar schism between two geopolitical and ideological superpowers — the United States and the Soviet Union — who fought a Cold War.

Both parties in the Cold War drew on a cultural and intellectual tradition of modern, enlightened rationalism. Both claimed to represent the very same values: the values of equality, of scientific rationality, of progress, of social justice, and of humanism. And in this

way, the struggle between two such powerful foes fighting over the same terrain made many people think that perhaps those values were not as clear and univocal in their implications as had previously been thought.

Now, what kept the Cold War cold — at least in the very heart of Europe — was the realization that the result of any conflict between the two superpowers in the European heartland or in their own metropolitan centers would be mutually assured destruction, precisely because both superpowers were supplied with vast numbers of thermonuclear missiles. This mutually assured destruction did ensure peace in Europe, but it created a climate of uncertainty and occasional terror during moments such as the Cuban Missile Crisis.

Moreover, mutually assured destruction as a deterrent highlighted the central contradiction between, on the one hand, the promise of scientific progress in the form of nuclear physics and nuclear energy — which allowed us not only to understand the world more profoundly but to harness the power of atomic forces — and, on the other hand, the dangerous fruit that such scientific progress and rationality could also produce, namely the modern weaponry of mass destruction and mass murder.

Indeed, even the truly inspiring exploration of space — which, if there ever was an Enlightenment achievement, it would certainly have been the exploration of space — had something of a pall cast over it, because that exploration was dominated by the military-industrial complexes of the two superpowers caught in a space race for potential strategic advantage in nuclear wars.

Another important development in the political world of the industrialized West was the decline of Western imperialism that came hard on the heels of the Second World War. This revealed several

interesting things. The struggles for independence and subsequent Third World non-alignment in the Cold War signaled that the values of the modern West were clearly not universal. Parliamentary democracies with independent judiciaries were to be the exception in the newly emerging Third World, rather than the rule. Indeed, many regimes were organized around ideological postures that were explicitly hostile to the secular modern ethos, whether it be the Maoist fanaticism of Pol Pot or the Islamic fundamentalism of Ayatollah Khomeini.

The end of colonial rule also brought former colonial subjects into the very heart of the old metropolises. This resulted in Western European societies being forced — for the first time — to struggle with and cope with changing populations that were no longer culturally and ethnically homogeneous. The problem of multi-ethnicity and multiculturalism emerged.

Some nations were relatively successful in dealing with this problem. The United States had a long history of multiculturalism and therefore had something of a head start, as had, strangely enough, the Soviet Union. The United Kingdom and the Netherlands were also fairly successful in creating inclusive and culturally pluralistic societies that downplayed the importance of ethnicity and cultural homogeneity. But on the continent, many other countries were more divided. New right-wing parties emerged, calling for an end to immigration and a return to ethnic nationalism. We think of Jean-Marie Le Pen in France and the Freedom Party in Austria. Tragically, the century ended with an almost tribal ethnic war among the various peoples of the former Yugoslavia — ending the century with horrific carnage at the very site where the First World War, the beginning of the carnage of the twentieth century, had been sparked.

The Realm of the Economy

The post-war period also saw dramatic changes in the economies of the West. Despite a general prosperity and a clearly rising standard of living and life expectancy in the Western world, many of these changes both dislocated people and produced considerable insecurity.

Most notably, as heavy and basic industries moved to the developing world, a new post-industrial economy emerged in the First World. An increasing share of these nations' GDPs became invested in information, service, and financial industries. And while this created booms in those sectors, many of the older blue-collar industries — like steel and automobiles — declined. These industries had been unionized and had generated middle-class incomes for semi-skilled and unskilled workers. Their decline dislocated these former industrial workers and left them in many cases scrambling to achieve a stable middle-class lifestyle.

Obviously, the economy became increasingly globalized, and this is reflected in the fact that heavy industries moved to cheaper labor markets. The immense opportunities created by this global marketplace — particularly in the aftermath of the Cold War, which allowed the market to penetrate almost every country in the world — led to truly remarkable concentrations of wealth, as well as truly remarkable concentrations of economic power. These concentrations are reminiscent of both the so-called Gilded Age of the late nineteenth century and, more importantly, the period of vertical integration at the beginning of the twentieth century.

On the other hand, the new global economy has also caused many to question the relevance of democratic nation-states, precisely because increasingly multilateral organizations like the WTO, financial markets, and the World Bank have ever-increasing power

over world trade in ways that seem to render nation-states irrelevant or powerless. Indeed, as OPEC reminds us every so often, in the new global economy, no industrial nation can be truly economically independent or autonomous.

The economic prosperity of the latter half of the twentieth century has also been accompanied by an intensification of work. We have become more productive, but we also work harder. This is reflected in the fact that there are many more people in the workforce than there used to be — far fewer households supplied by a single earner. Not only are more people working, but more people are working more intensively and logging longer hours than at mid-century. And many people have the feeling that, in the struggle to get ahead, we keep running faster and faster and often seem to be barely keeping up.

The Realm of Culture and Information

In terms of culture and information, the second half of the twentieth century was subject to an information revolution. The rise of television, popular music, youth culture, and mass spectatorial professional athletics all contributed to the emergence of a mass popular culture that has become increasingly globalized.

On the one hand, this culture offered entertainment opportunities and venues for popular expression to segments of the population that had previously had limited cultural resources. It also brought the world together in sharing spectatorial events and mass entertainments. But on the other hand, this culture tended to promote hedonism, narcissism, and consumerism — it was, after all, an industry. What some saw as harmless fun and entertainment, others saw as debasing and as what they called a "dumbing down" of cultural norms.

The development of the high-speed digital computer, and subsequent to it, the internet revolution, quickened the pace of global communications. And for those wired to the information superhighway, it democratized access to information. But on the other hand, the cyber age has also been charged with fostering a personalized mode of interaction, a sense of alienation, a growing feeling of information overload, and perhaps most troublingly, a widening social and economic rift between information haves and have-nots.

Both the computing revolution and a dramatic expansion of academia in the post-war period have resulted in a profusion of high-cultural research and work. On the one hand, this has produced a dramatic explosion of scientific and humanistic knowledge, at an ever-increasing and accelerating rate. But on the other hand, this has also resulted in a growing specialization, not only within fields and disciplines but within subfields as well. And this has produced a sense of cultural fragmentation and the fear — particularly strong, I think, in the humanities and social sciences — that we are in fact learning more and more about less and less, that our understanding of the world is increasingly fragmented, and that it is impossible to get a sense of the whole.

Scientific and technological advance continues to accelerate, generating both hope and fear. Particularly dramatic in the closing decades of the twentieth century were advances in molecular biology and genetics, resulting in the Human Genome Project at the end of the century. This project exemplifies the fundamental tension or problematic of modern scientific progress and rationality. On the one hand, mapping the human genome holds the promise of an entirely new and far more powerful scientific medicine — a medicine that can dramatically increase longevity and treat hitherto incurable

conditions. But on the other hand, it also opens the dark prospect of a genetically engineered brave new world.

It was these unsettling changes, when coupled with the transformations and crises of the previous fifty years, that led many philosophers to re-examine the entire project of modernity itself — a project that really starts with the Enlightenment. And in some ways, we can see the latter half of the twentieth century as placing both modernity and the Enlightenment on trial. In particular, philosophers focused on two critical issues, both inherited from the Enlightenment: the practice and theory of modern politics, and the ideal of objective scientific rationality and progress.

The Problem of Modern Politics

Let us begin with the problem of politics. In its assault on tradition and the old aristocratic monarchical regime — the *ancien régime* — the Enlightenment had argued for a new scientific politics, a politics that would be based on rational demonstration and cross-historical research. Such a politics would uncover self-evident truths, principles, and values. These were subsequently used to legitimate and support the liberal democratic reforms and revolutions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: reforms that resulted in a legally sovereign state organized around a parliament that held sovereignty and whose function was to ensure the rights and properties of individuals.

But the twentieth century saw the rise of an activist state — a state whose power resided not necessarily in the legislature but rather in the executive, a state that was administrative, whose social welfare policies traded in entitlements rather than natural rights, and where real power often resided in a bureaucratic officialdom rather than in a traditional elected legislature.

So the problem for political theorists was what to make of — how to react to — this divergence between Enlightenment theories of liberal parliamentarianism and the current practices of social democracy that had evolved from those earlier systems and theories. We can mark three distinct strategies.

The Liberal Strategy. The first strategy I call the liberal strategy, and it has been to try to reconcile theory and practice by showing the fundamental affinity between social democracy on the one hand and enlightened modern political theory on the other. John Rawls has fused social contractarianism with Kantian universalism in order to generate a theory of social justice that both fulfills the Enlightenment ideal of a rational scientific politics — including, incidentally, an appreciation for individual liberty in keeping with the conceptions of the Enlightenment — while at the same time allowing for an activist state, a state that will intervene to ensure the welfare of all of its citizens.

The imprint of the Enlightenment is all over Rawls' defense of social democracy. We can see it in his invocation of the French revolutionary ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity. We can see it in his faith in the univocal power of reason, which shows up in his belief that in the original position — his version of the social contract, where we have no knowledge of our future interests and are therefore dispassionate — we will be purely rational, and reason itself will generate consensus and agreement. Reason is, in this sense, univocal.

Jürgen Habermas is another liberal in this sense, one who seeks to ground social democratic practice in enlightened modern ideals. But rather than invoke social contractarianism, Habermas invokes what he calls an ideal speech situation, arguing that there are immanent values in communicative action itself, and that once those ideals are

examined, one can induce a set of values which can inform social democracy.

Again, like Rawls, Habermas shares the Enlightenment faith in the univocality of reason and rationality. He too believes that if we could eliminate the ideological distortions that affect our speech — if we could eliminate mass media communication and propaganda — the result would be a dispassionate, discursive situation that would be purely rational and therefore produce consensus and understanding. I mention this as an Enlightenment faith because other figures of the period, like Foucault — who do not share the Enlightenment ideals — would see communicative action as being not at all about creating consensus and understanding, but about domination, power, and manipulation.

The Conservative Strategy. There has been a conservative strategy as well in dealing with this disjuncture between enlightened ideals and modern practice, and that has been, instead of trying to reconcile the two, to acknowledge that they really are in contradiction to one another. The ideals of enlightened political theory and current social democratic practice simply cannot be squared, and the point for the conservatives is to reject the latter — social democracy — in favor of those Enlightenment ideals.

Friedrich Hayek, in his critique of central planning and in his defense of what he called undesigned institutions, stressed the fundamental irrationality and lack of adequate knowledge involved when activist states attempt to manipulate and intrude upon the economy. According to Hayek, only free markets can successfully incorporate the scattered knowledge found in various pockets of society. Moreover, free markets themselves can only exist under the rule of law — the rule of law meaning legislative and judicial sovereignty rather than bureaucratic and regulatory power. And only laws which give us equal protection regardless of our social circumstance, and

which also restrain the state as well as its citizens, can produce the freedom necessary for free markets and an enlightened life.

Robert Nozick shows that our notion of fundamental rights is fundamentally incompatible with many of our social democratic practices. Nozick draws on the same social contractarianism as Rawls, though he deploys a bit more Locke and a bit less so of Kant. Nozick argues that the only legitimate form of state that would compensate us for our loss of natural liberty would not be the social democratic welfare state that Rawls calls for, but rather a libertarian night watchman state — what Carlyle called anarchy with a street constable. By grounding property rights in the labor of individuals, Nozick reiterates the Enlightenment argument that the forced redistribution of wealth, which we practice through taxation and transfer payments, is in fact a form of political forced labor — what the American revolutionaries called political slavery.

The Radical Strategy. There has been a third strategy in dealing with this disjuncture between Enlightenment theory and modern political practice, and that is a radical strategy arguing that Enlightenment theories are, in some sense, entirely irrelevant.

Richard Rorty adopts this approach by arguing that social democracy does not really need philosophical grounding at all. You defend contemporary social democracy by comparing it to all the other options, and once one sees all the other options, one realizes this is the best form of life. This is quite similar to Winston Churchill's famous defense of democracy: democracy is the worst form of government, except for all the others. Moreover, Rorty believes that if social democracy did require a philosophical foundation, the narrow rationalism of Enlightenment scientism would be the wrong basis. One would be much better opting for romantic utopianism, which is a far more compatible high-cultural tradition for our modern social democratic aspirations.

By way of contrast, the late Alvin Gouldner argued that what was really critical to modern political theory and practice was not so much the peculiarities of Enlightenment political doctrines — the notions of natural rights or social contracts — but rather something even deeper and more profound: the culture of critical discourse and rationality that underlay such doctrines, a culture which expressed the emerging class consciousness of a new class of technical intelligentsia and humanistic intellectuals.

So, in contrast to Rorty, Gouldner is actually defending the Enlightenment while arguing that Enlightenment doctrines per se are irrelevant. The real key to reconciling the Enlightenment with modern politics is to see that the Enlightenment offered us not particular political theories, but a grammar of theorizing — one that allowed for a publicly performed fusion of scientific and humanistic knowledge and values, a fusion which is reflected in this new class made up of both scientific intelligentsia and humanistic intellectuals.

The Crisis of Scientific Rationality

The second crisis of modernity, which I mentioned earlier, involves the normative ideal of scientific rationality itself. This ideal had been hailed by the Enlightenment as an objective and progressive form of knowledge. Science would liberate us from the shackles of prejudice, break the fetters of tradition, and free us from superstition. From science, presumably, would emerge a new secular humanist culture — one that would be not only free of prejudice, tradition, and superstition, but more coherent and consensual than the older tradition-based cultures. And this was important because the Enlightenment argued that it was precisely those older, tradition-based systems of superstition that had produced conflict, religious war, and dark ages. The new secular humanist culture, it was hoped,

would allow us to supersede that era of conflict. Scientific communities were, after all, consensual. A politics and culture based on science would therefore be consensual and conflict-free as well.

In reality, however, science — both social and natural — has been far from univocal, and consensus has remained an elusive goal. Nor have prejudice and conflict been entirely banished. Indeed, in many cases science has been used to legitimate ideological fanaticism and atrocities, and scientific rationality has been deployed in pursuit of barbarous ends. We can think of the popular eugenics of the early twentieth century and the way it ultimately resulted in the practice of genocide in the Second World War. We can think of the extreme claims for social science made by certain Bolsheviks, which resulted in the totalitarian despotism of the Soviet Union and of China.

Well, this has led many philosophers to re-examine whether scientific rationality has lived up to its Enlightenment billing, and whether it is and ought to be the normative ideal for our culture.

Karl Popper was an important defender and champion of scientific rationality, and with it, the secular, pluralistic, enlightened ideals associated with it. While he denied the possibility of scientific certitude, he did stress the probabilistic and rational grounds for belief in scientific theories — theories which are in principle falsifiable, meaning that deductive, hypothetical theories can in principle be contradicted by experience. To the extent that they have not yet been contradicted, we therefore have probabilistic and rational grounds to believe in them. Popper stressed the intersubjective nature of scientific observation and criticism, and this intersubjectivity is clearly redolent of the Enlightenment quest for objectivity and intellectual community and consensus. It is also reflected in his rejection of relativism: we can all observe the same phenomena and reach and test the same hypotheses.

Thomas Kuhn, by way of contrast, rejected the traditional cumulative image of science. Instead, he embraced a conjunctural interpretation of science which argued that scientific progress happens through scientific revolutions. In this view, scientific progress is in fact a fairly messy business, based not on consensus but on bitter conflicts between scientific worldviews or paradigms — conflicts that were often no-holds-barred and fundamentally irreconcilable. So where Popper's philosophy of science had taken an epistemological point of view, Kuhn's historically nuanced view drew on the sociology of academic knowledge.

Willard Quine offered a broader, if less strident, defense of scientific rationality than Popper. Unlike the logical empiricist Popper, Quine's ontological relativity did acknowledge that even scientific reference could on occasion become inscrutable and therefore relative, much in keeping with Kuhn's findings. Yet his underlying pragmatic insistence on linguistic holism and naturalism resulted in a project — *Epistemology Naturalized* — that sought to subsume the traditional theory of knowledge within an idiom composed of elements of psychology and evolutionary biology. His core philosophical project, then, is in keeping with the Enlightenment's ideal of science as the highest form of human knowledge. Indeed, his defense of common sense is based on his understanding of common sense as a kind of unreflective and unselfconscious science. Even his invocation of simplicity as a fundamental criterion of theoretical choice is grounded in Darwinian convictions.

On the other hand, **Richard Rorty** has deployed Quinean pragmatism to argue against Enlightenment scientism. Rorty has claimed that the most interesting developments in twentieth-century culture have not been in the sciences but in the humanities and humanistic disciplines. For him, it is Freudian psychology and literary

criticism that have been far more edifying and practically liberating than quantum physics or fractal geometry.

Jacques Derrida has rejected the Enlightenment and its cult of modern scientific rationality, arguing that it is just another form of traditional philosophic logocentrism. Logocentrism is based on invidious binary distinctions between a philosophically privileged higher realm and the materially based lower. Derrida seeks to deconstruct such culturally imposed distinctions by embracing the culturally marginal and denying the existence of any pre-existing norms, fixed truths, or pure methods and logics. Heralding a new postmodern worldview, Derrida rejects the modern goals of certainty and rationality, arguing instead for the high-cultural free play of meaning and the Nietzschean embrace of chaotic becoming and appearance. Unfortunately, it was precisely such free play of irrational becoming and appearance that led his intellectual forebears — Martin Heidegger and Paul de Man — to collaborate quite willingly with the Nazis during the Second World War. Derrida fails to tell us why, if one view is as valid as another and none are to be privileged over another, anyone would choose to adopt his stance — since it is both dreary and associated with no small amount of obscurantism, irresponsibility, and general historical nastiness.

Alasdair MacIntyre represents a newly emerging right-wing form of postmodernism. Like Derrida, MacIntyre rejects the Enlightenment's cult of scientific rationality, in particular its assault on tradition. Modernity's fact-value distinction, inherited from the Enlightenment, has made moral debate irresolvable and fostered a culture of moral relativism. And the result is not pluralism and tolerance, but intensified conflict. Precisely because there is no common ground on issues like the question of abortion, there is a very quick and easy disposition to move toward the building of firebombs.

MacIntyre rejects the modern inheritance of enlightened rationality as itself incoherent and self-contradictory. The modern critique of tradition as irrational is itself a tradition — albeit a modern one — and would therefore presumably have to be itself irrational. Similarly, the Enlightenment's critique of prejudice was based on an unreflective animosity rather than on a careful study of such prejudices, and therefore it is itself prejudiced.

But unlike Derrida, MacIntyre does not revel in the incoherence, relativity, free play, marginality, and deconstruction that result from the demise of Enlightenment scientism. Instead, he seeks a new coherence in traditions — in his case, largely that of the Judeo-Christian tradition, and in particular Thomism — traditions that disclose moral *phronesis*, or practical judgment, rather than the sort of scientific rules and procedures that the Enlightenment had promised. Such right-wing postmodernism treats traditions like paradigms that give meaning — or what he calls a horizon — and context to our actions and choices, helping us develop complete and well-rounded characters.

However, despite his attempt to avoid relativism by arguing that some traditions are simply more rational than others, one is left wondering why we should embrace rationality at all as a value for judging between traditions. Since our preference for rational traditions is itself a result of the peculiar tradition of modern Enlightenment secular culture — which MacIntyre wants to reject — one wonders why we should reject the Enlightenment itself rather than simply reject the value of rationality that is central to it. Which is to say: if we are to reject the Enlightenment, why use its central shibboleth to argue that our Western Judeo-Christian and scientific traditions are better than more so-called primitive ones?

And I think the point to be made here is that, for all its discontents, it would appear that modernity will be with us for some time to come.

Even its critics cannot escape its grasp.

Lecture 74: Hayek and the Critique of Central Planning

Professor Jeremy Shearmur

In this lecture, I am going to talk about Friedrich Hayek, who lived from 1899 to 1992. The structure of the lecture is as follows. I am going to start with some preliminaries and a bit of background. Then I am going to talk about the early Hayek, who was a mild socialist, and the impact on him of the economist Ludwig von Mises.

I am then going to talk about some of Hayek's most characteristic ideas: his ideas about knowledge, his ideas about undesigned and imperfect institutions, and his critique of the ideal of social justice. From this I am going to turn to the implications that this material has for socialism, to his book *The Road to Serfdom*, and also to Hayek's ideas about the rule of law.

I am then going to turn to some of the later work of Hayek — the work of his old age — and finally to talk a little bit about the heritage of Hayek, about the open problems and issues left by his work.

Preliminaries

Let me turn, then, to some preliminaries. First, I have to make a personal confession. I became seriously interested in Hayek's work in the 1970s. Indeed, in the early 1970s I wrote a Ph.D. dissertation on his political thought. I subsequently published a book about him. And I actually think that his work is of immense importance for how we should think about our society and for a number of problems that we are facing today.

Who was he? Well, he was Austrian-born — an economist and a philosopher. In the 1930s, he moved from Austria to the UK and became a British citizen. He spent many years in the US at the University of Chicago and ended his life teaching and working back in Austria and Germany.

He is well known in a number of different academic fields. In 1974, he received a Nobel Prize in economics, with particular emphasis on his early work on the theory of money and economic fluctuations, and on his analysis of the interdependence of economic, social, and institutional phenomena. Subsequent to this, he worked largely on issues in social and legal philosophy, but he also produced distinguished work in the history of ideas, and is in addition known for some interesting ideas in psychology. He really is a polymath.

Hayek was also very much a public intellectual — not the kind of professor who simply stays in his study writing. He wrote *The Road to Serfdom*, a controversial critique of economic planning, and was the founder of an association called the Mont Pelerin Society, which became an important association of libertarian and conservative intellectuals.

Hayek was a prolific author. His most important works are difficult to single out given how much he produced, but one might mention his *Pure Theory of Capital* as his technical work on economics, and *The Sensory Order* on problems in psychology. In my view, however, his key works are *Individualism and Economic Order*, *The Road to Serfdom*, and *The Constitution of Liberty* — all dealing with issues in social and political philosophy.

Why, you might ask, does he matter? Well, first, he is important for historical reasons. He exercised an important historical influence on politics at different times. Immediately after the Second World War, his work on issues and problems about planning was influential both

in the UK and in the US. In the 1970s and 1980s, he was rediscovered by people who became staffers and influential figures in the Thatcher and Reagan governments.

Second, I think he is important because he is responsible for the argument — now pretty widely accepted — that the traditional understanding of socialism, namely that socialism means getting away from markets and replacing them by central economic planning and a notion of complete social ownership of the means of production, is deeply problematic. At the very least, if one is attracted to socialist ideals, one needs to find new ways to pursue them other than that traditional approach. Socialism, in a sense, needs to be radically rethought if it is still going to be viable.

And finally, there are problems raised by Hayek's work that remain outstanding, and which it will be very important for us to continue to pursue.

Hayek's Early Socialism and the Impact of Von Mises

Let me turn, then, to the origins of Hayek's distinctive approaches — to his own early socialism and to the impact made on him by the economist von Mises. As a young man, Hayek was really moved by dire social conditions, particularly the situation in Vienna around and especially after the First World War, when the situation of many people in Vienna was very, very grim. There was a great deal of poverty, and Hayek was prompted by this towards a form of mild socialism. After training as an economist and a brief period in the US, he returned to Vienna and there worked with an economist called Ludwig von Mises.

Now, Mises had argued that what he termed economic calculation under socialism was impossible. To understand Mises' argument, we need to understand what economic calculation is all about, and we

need to distinguish two things: technical superiority on the one side and economic superiority on the other.

What is technical superiority? Well, imagine there are two different ways in which a particular product could be made, and one could imagine — with a bit of generosity — that one process is simply more efficient in all dimensions than another. So that, for example, if making a particular product requires a variety of different components, you could imagine the new, updated mechanism cutting down on all the different supplies needed. In that case, you would say that the new machine was technically superior to the older one, and you would choose it on grounds of simple efficiency.

Economic superiority is a bit more tricky. It is much more a phenomenon of the real world, because what will often happen is that if there are two different alternative ways of doing things, one of them may use more of some factors of production than the other does, while the other may use more of different factors. You may be in a situation where one way of doing things uses more of some components, and the other way uses more of other components. How are you going to evaluate which one to use?

Mises' argument was essentially that in a market-based economy one can make such a decision, because prices generated within the market are a good guide to the alternative possible uses of resources. That is to say, all the different decisions of various kinds of people feed into what a particular thing costs, and you can use prices to guide you as to which process to use — namely, you go for the one that is cheaper.

What Mises wanted to argue was that you simply do not have access to that kind of information, and thus you simply cannot do economic calculations if there are no markets. And he said that socialists at the time he was writing were proposing to get rid of markets, but if they

did so, rather than gaining in economic efficiency as they hoped, they would find themselves in a situation where they simply could not make this kind of economic evaluation without markets.

This claim, as you can imagine, led to a lot of controversy. Hayek, being a socialist himself, was somewhat challenged by Mises' broad arguments, but in the end he was really quite impressed by them — though he felt that in some respects the argument was not quite right. Hayek sat down, reworked the issues, and joined in the debate about Mises' work, and it is out of this that some of Hayek's key arguments emerge.

Key Themes: Knowledge, Undesigned Institutions, and Social Justice

The Social Division of Knowledge

This leads me to Hayek's key redevelopment of Mises' views — specifically the argument about what he called the social division of knowledge. Here it is useful to recall Adam Smith and his theme of the social division of labor: the way in which, in a market-based economy — in what Smith called a commercial society — the activities of various different people can be coordinated not by someone telling each of them what to do, but rather by their being guided by economic self-interest and prices.

Hayek said that in addition to a social division of labor, there is what could be termed a social division of information or of knowledge. Knowledge is scattered through a society. For example, what are people's tastes? If someone wanted to invite people they had never met before for a drink, would they know, as relative strangers, what those people would like to drink?

What about knowledge dependent on particular situations? Someone may know, for example, exactly what the market is like for a particular crop because of that situationally based knowledge. There are also all kinds of skills and tacit knowledge. Take someone who is a successful market trader — someone who perhaps sets up in a particular part of Washington, D.C., serving people who are coming out of the metro. That person is likely to know just what those people will want, but may find it very difficult to communicate. Suppose that person was a friend of yours, was ill, and you said, I am happy to go to the wholesalers — you tell me what I should buy. They might well say, I am sorry, I cannot do that. I know my customers, but I simply cannot articulate this kind of knowledge.

What Hayek wanted to argue is that within an economy there is all of this knowledge that different people possess which cannot be centralized — it cannot be made available to central economic planners. But, he argued, market mechanisms allow for decentralized decision-taking, and thus for the utilization of this scattered knowledge, because individuals can make use of it in the different situations in which they find themselves.

Basically, what he is saying is that in a market economy, particular individuals taking decisions can be guided by prices while acting on the local information they possess and drawing on their own individual know-how — feeding that knowledge into the overall decision-making processes of society. If instead you insisted on centralizing all decision-making and asked all of those people to write in their information, they probably could not do it; and even if the information were somehow furnished, the people operating centrally would not know what to do with it in that form.

Undesigned and Imperfect Institutions

Hayek also wanted to draw wider lessons from this material. In particular, he wanted to show that markets — which were already in

place and already working — had features and capabilities that we had not fully realized. It was only when people suggested getting rid of markets and replacing them with central planning that one could, by critical reflection, start to understand some of the things that our institutions were accomplishing without our having appreciated it.

An undesigned social institution — something that no one deliberately set up — can turn out to be playing a key role. And in this respect, he says, we must not look down on institutions. Things we have inherited traditionally, we must not dismiss simply because they have not been deliberately designed. There may be all kinds of useful social functions being discharged by institutions that were never deliberately planned.

Other examples he gave included language. It evolves; it enables us to do all kinds of things; but no one sat down and deliberately planned it. He also pointed at various times to the tradition of common law as performing all kinds of useful functions in society without anyone deliberately setting out to design something to do so. There is indeed a parallel between the lessons Hayek wanted to draw — suggesting a somewhat conservative approach towards institutions, on the grounds that there may be wisdom in them that we have not appreciated — and what happened in Adam Smith's thought, where he talked about the role of prices and incentives and then generalized to the notion of an invisible hand. You have a similar kind of move going on in Hayek's work.

Another vitally important feature of Hayek's argument is that he recognized that, given the role played by economic self-interest in this context, a society like ours may be in some important ways morally imperfect. For example, it may run on greed — but in ways that we really cannot do anything about. That is to say, some things may be genuinely morally a little bit unpleasant. Some conservatives may wish to defend everything that goes on in a market setting, but I

think more realistically one can say: yes, a lot of it is fine, but there may also be people doing things that are not terribly nice, and yet what they are doing may play a really important role, because if they were not doing it, things would run much less efficiently. It seems to me it should have been in those sorts of terms that the film *Wall Street*, for example, should have offered a defense for its entrepreneur's activities — in terms of the wider benefits to society of those rather tacky efforts.

Hayek confronts us with this directly: we may be able to make important moral criticisms of our institutions; we may say they are really imperfect; but that does not necessarily mean we can move to anything better if we still want certain important social tasks undertaken.

The Critique of Social Justice

All of this led Hayek to develop a critique of the ideal of social justice. Hayek argued that the economic system uses prices — and thus what we receive by way of wages and so on — for the purposes of transmitting information and also for motivating people. But he made the key point that this means the rewards people receive within such a society, the prices we get for our services, do not depend on merit.

Let me give you an example. I work sometimes in a department of philosophy, and one could well imagine that in the same corridor, with very similar backgrounds, there are two philosophy professors both working on issues in logic. One of them may have an equally good career as the other, but — the sad truth is that professors do not get paid all that much — lives a quiet and modest life. His colleague just down the corridor suddenly discovers that his work, of a completely abstract kind and very similar to the other's, just happens to have important implications for new developments in software writing. Suddenly, this person is flown from a small liberal

arts college in the Midwest to Seattle, given a salary offer of just unbelievable proportions.

This is the way in which a market-based society works. This person has no more merit than his other colleague. They have similar careers and similar diligence; they are equally good or bad at teaching. But because of the usefulness to other people of what one of them is doing, he suddenly gets a huge payoff, and his colleague back home says, I do not understand this. Things just are not fair. There is no way in which this person has merits that go beyond mine, and yet I am stuck on a small salary in a small Midwestern town while this other person is off in Seattle with Bill Gates.

What Hayek is saying is that because of the social role that these systems of prices play, you simply do not have room for rewarding people purely on the basis of merit. Indeed, he wanted to argue that you cannot do so in a market-based society — you cannot systematically change rates of pay to make them track what people merit. And thus the ideal of social justice, in the sense of rewards for work fitting merit, simply makes no sense in a setting that makes use of market mechanisms. Those mechanisms are already doing other work, and if they are going to do that other work, they cannot at the same time reward people on the basis of merit — in the sense of rewards for diligence and conscientiousness — precisely because they are needed to generate the kind of differential between work which has applications benefiting large numbers of people and work which does not.

This does not mean, I should stress, that from Hayek's perspective one cannot have a welfare safety net. His own view was that yes, if your society is rich enough to handle it, it is fine to have a welfare system — but you need to keep that outside the market rather than trying to change the system of rewards within markets to make it more egalitarian or more fitting to notions of merit. Because if you

do that, you are interfering with the mechanisms needed to play those other roles.

The Road to Serfdom and the Rule of Law

From all of this, let me turn to *The Road to Serfdom* and Hayek's ideas about the rule of law.

Hayek's argument about knowledge had important implications for socialism. First of all, he wanted to say that it strikes at the heart of the notion that central planning could serve as an alternative or substitute for markets. He wanted to argue simply that you cannot run a socialist society — if that means a fully planned society — and at the same time enjoy the benefits of the effective use of socially dispersed knowledge. For some time in his own life, he retained a personal sympathy for socialist ideals and for a measure of egalitarianism alongside the development of these arguments. Later on, those ideals seem to have been dropped, though he does not really explain why.

Indeed, some socialists — for example, Lord Plant and David Miller in the UK, two academics (one of whom later moved to the House of Lords), and in the US the economist John Roemer — looked for ways of pursuing egalitarian socialist ideals compatible with Hayek's argument. They took Hayek's argument seriously, acknowledged that it hits traditional interpretations of socialism, but sought to take the humane spirit of socialism and find other ways of reinterpreting it. Others contested Hayek's argument and insisted there must be some flaws in it.

Hayek, in addition to developing the ideas I have talked about so far, also offered a broader critique of central planning in *The Road to Serfdom*. What he wanted to argue is that the fact that there may be difficulties about central planning does not mean that people will not

try to plan a society. And Hayek's argument was that the systematic pursuit of planning would lead to terrible problems and a loss of freedom.

At bottom, he said, people may have incompatible preferences and priorities — differences that actually cannot be resolved simply by rational argument. He said that in a market-based society with private property, people can in a sense agree to differ about such things and pursue incompatible ideas, each person using their own resources. But under central planning, where there may be a commitment to using resources in a good and rational way, these issues have to be resolved. Consider the example of smoking. Typically you have something which some people want to do and are entirely comfortable with, while others think it is simply wrong — in the sense that any of it should be going on at all — and find many ways to make it as uncomfortable as possible. This happens in a society in which it is agreed that people can do this in their own time and on their own property. Consider, however, a situation of collective decision-making: would any of the passionate non-smokers allow any resources to go toward the production of this noxious product? And what about those who favor smoking? Would one be able to resolve these disagreements through collective decision-making in a fully rational way?

Hayek wanted to argue that there will be all kinds of differences of this kind which simply are not going to be susceptible to rational resolution — differences in tastes, differences perhaps in religious or ethical views, which you cannot resolve by simple rational means. His argument was that if you have a government, if you have central planners committed to resolving all problems rationally, the form of resolution can only be arbitrary. But if the planners' legitimacy depends on their actions appearing rational, this has to be imposed

on everyone else and made to look rational by the use of propaganda.

In addition, he wanted to argue that within planned economies there is a dangerous concentration of power — one going far beyond anything found within capitalist societies. There is a lot of controversy, for example, about Microsoft and the power and wealth of Bill Gates. You can argue this one way or the other, but clearly one can see that he would have an enormous amount of clout if he wanted to do something. That is utterly trivial compared to what the concentration of power would be in, say, a centrally planned U.S. economy. Hayek was deeply concerned about the sheer power that such decision-makers would hold, and about the difficulties of controlling such a concentration of power democratically. All told, Hayek wanted to argue — and this led to a great deal of controversy — that persistence in an attempt to plan centrally would lead in the end to a loss of freedom.

Keynes' Challenge and the Rule of Law

One of the readers of Hayek's *Road to Serfdom* was the economist John Maynard Keynes — an important figure with whom Hayek had been engaged in various bitter theoretical disagreements in the 1930s. Keynes sent Hayek a reply, and was surprisingly sympathetic to the book, but raised a problem. He said: look, Hayek, you don't favor a system of strict laissez-faire. You have an agenda for governmental action. By your own argument, doesn't that mean you yourself are already at the top of the slippery slope toward serfdom? How are you going to respond to this?

Now, I cannot demonstrate that the ideas Hayek subsequently developed were a direct response to Keynes' criticism, but it certainly looks to me as if they may have been. In particular, Hayek wrote about the rule of law in a way that I think can be understood in precisely this context.

When Hayek wrote about the rule of law, he interpreted it in terms of law being equally applicable to all citizens and also to the government itself — meaning that the government should only do things it is permitted to do under the law. The law should also be general in character, accessible to citizens, and not retrospective. Hayek had in *The Road to Serfdom* expressed the view that central planning might pose some problems with regard to its compatibility with the rule of law. Later, he suggested the rule of law as a criterion for when government action is or is not going to put freedom in jeopardy. In effect, he said that it is a necessary condition — though not a sufficient one — for not risking people's freedom. There may be all kinds of things the government can do that are ill-advised or problematic, but at the very least, if what the government is doing is compatible with the rule of law and its actions fit these general criteria, then you are not going to run into the kinds of problems that *The Road to Serfdom* suggested you would otherwise get from governmental action. He seemed, in other words, to be suggesting that appeal to this ideal could help to get around Keynes' challenge.

It turns out that the ideal of the rule of law has three different facets in Hayek's work. On the one side, it forms the institutional basis for economic activity of the kind found in an extended market-based society; it is a precondition for the effective use of the social division of knowledge. It serves, as I indicated, as a criterion for when government action is in order. And it also relates to Hayek's understanding of individual freedom. Individuals, in his view, are free provided they are not being singled out for arbitrary action by government — provided, as it were, that laws are made in purely general terms.

The Later Hayek

From his reaction to Mises onwards, Hayek had a tendency to generalize lessons from economics, to talk more generally about unplanned institutions — not just in an economic context — much as Adam Smith did with regard to the invisible hand. At times, Hayek's critique of planning and radical reform was presented as a critique of rationalistic approaches to society, somewhat in the manner of Edmund Burke.

Later, under the impact of the Italian legal philosopher Bruno Leoni, Hayek became concerned about some uncertainties that may follow from legislative changes to the legal system. He was worried that Congress might constantly keep changing the law so that people could not do long-term planning. He came in the end to say that there should be much more emphasis on common law processes in legal formation, rather than having the making of law in the hands of Congress.

In his later writings, Hayek often presented a somewhat conservative view of the superiority of unplanned social institutions or traditions over anything deliberately designed — again, somewhat in the manner of Burke. He backed this up in some of his later writings with some ideas, not altogether successful in my view, about how such institutions might evolve through a process of social evolution. But these ideas were always found alongside — and in some ways in tension with — support for the kind of critical rationalist approach one finds in the work of his friend Karl Popper. So there were tensions there.

The Heritage of Hayek

What about the heritage of Hayek? Well, first of all, I think Hayek's views are both stimulating and challenging. They develop out of his

critique of socialist planning and out of his ideas on the social division of knowledge. If one accepts them and accepts that we need markets, then they suggest that we need to radically change some of our other ideals — at the very least how we interpret socialism or how we interpret notions of social justice. His ideas about freedom and the rule of law are striking, though several scholars have expressed doubts about whether they really do work in the end.

I also think Hayek's writings suggest many other important issues. His stress on the social division of knowledge leads to the following problem: you have talked about tacit knowledge within society and how one can handle it by way of economic incentives and prices — but what about tacit knowledge within organizations? Take a large organization: there will be tacit knowledge there. How is this made available to the people taking the key decisions? There is, I think, a genuine challenge from Hayek's work — if you take it seriously — to think about how it applies to issues of organizational design and management. And I think there are some interesting links between this and issues being explored today under the heading of knowledge management within the management literature.

Summary

I am now at the end, and so may I just recapitulate where we have been. After a few preliminaries, I talked about Hayek's early socialism and the impact made on him by Mises. I talked then about the key themes in his work: knowledge, undesigned and imperfect institutions, and his critique of social justice. I then talked about the application of these ideas to socialism, his *Road to Serfdom*, and his ideas about the rule of law. And finally I discussed the later Hayek and some of the heritage of his work, and the open problems that it raises. Thank you very much.

Lecture 75: Popper, the Open Society, and the Philosophy of Science

Professor Jeremy Shearmur

In this lecture, I am going to talk about Karl Popper, who lived from 1902 to 1994. Let me explain briefly what the structure of the lecture will be. First, I am going to go through a few preliminaries about his life and so on. Second, I am going to talk about scientific knowledge and the challenge that Popper offered to traditional views of scientific knowledge. I am then going to talk about what the resulting picture of scientific knowledge looks like as it comes out of Popper's work. I am then going to talk about what I will call the big picture — about what this view really means for us, his picture of human beings and of what we are up to. From this, I will turn to his ideas about society, and then to a brief conclusion.

Preliminaries

First, then, some preliminaries. I must, at the outset, confess to a special interest in Popper. I was a student of his at the London School of Economics, which is part of the University of London, and I actually worked as his personal assistant for over eight years, so I have a special stake in this. Popper has a major reputation in the United Kingdom, quite wide recognition on the European continent, but I think he is less well known in the US, although I think he deserves to be better known here.

Who was he? Well, he was born in Austria of non-observant Jewish parents. They had, in fact, formally converted to Lutheranism, but were really secular in their outlook. Popper, though, because he was of Jewish ancestry, had to flee, anticipating that there would be a

Nazi takeover in Austria. During the Second World War, he obtained a job as a philosophy lecturer in New Zealand, and then at the end of the Second World War he moved to the UK, where he taught at the University of London. During the course of his life he made some visits to and held some brief appointments in the US, but he was largely centered in the UK.

His chief works — the works for which he is best known — are *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*, initially published in Vienna as *Logik der Forschung*, and also *The Open Society and Its Enemies*. He published a whole range of other books as well.

Why does Popper matter? Well, his views have important implications both for how we understand knowledge and how we view ourselves, but also for society. Let me commence the substance of the lecture by saying something about scientific knowledge and the challenge that Popper made to established ideas in this area.

Scientific Knowledge and the Challenge to Traditional Views

There are two aspects of the traditional view of knowledge that he called into question. On the one side, people have often talked about knowledge as being justified true belief. It is belief — things that people believe. If it is knowledge, it is true, but it must also be justified. It is not things that are true but that people happen to know by accident; rather, it is things which people can, in a sense, prove or demonstrate to be correct. A second aspect of knowledge that Popper challenged was that claims to knowledge are often seen as a justification for the authority of rulers. An image here, going right back in time, is Plato's *Republic* and the notion there of philosopher kings — the notion that if some people really know the truth about the world and about human nature, they should have

political authority. There is a sense in which this notion that the expert should be in charge echoes through time. And these are the things that Popper challenged.

Popper argued with respect to knowledge that we should learn an important lesson from the challenge that Einstein made to Sir Isaac Newton. In order to understand this, and its significance, one has first of all to appreciate something of the significance of Newton's scientific ideas. With Isaac Newton, humanity had achieved a kind of knowledge it had never possessed before. In his *Principia* one found a unified theory about the ordinary happenings in the physical world, together with a theory dealing with the motions of the planets. This was not only something which scientists got excited about, but ordinary people as well, because one could now do things like predicting the return of comets in detail in a way which had never been possible before. Newton made a huge impact on people of his day, even on poets. Alexander Pope is well known for the epitaph he wrote for Newton:

Nature and Nature's laws lay hid in night;

God said, "Let Newton be!" and all was light.

So one has here a really impressive example of human knowledge that seemed, in a sense, to show that mankind could achieve a knowledge of the world of a sort that people had perhaps hoped for before but had never really attained. Here, it seemed, one had it at last.

It is in this context that Popper wanted to argue that one should appreciate the significance of Einstein's challenge to Newton. That is to say, what Einstein did was to take the best and most thoroughly confirmed piece of human knowledge we had ever possessed and to argue that it was not quite right — that it was wrong — and to put forward an alternative to it. And Popper argued that this really

illustrates something important: namely, that while in science we can aim at truth, we can never tell for sure that we have reached it. So even the kind of well-confirmed scientific knowledge that got poets excited might turn out not to be right.

Our best-known knowledge — science — is not, Popper wanted to say, justified true belief. He wanted to say that scientific knowledge, as in the case of Newton, may turn out not to be true. It certainly is not justified, because however many times and however impressively it is confirmed, this may not show that it is true. It may be false. And, Popper wanted to say, it is best not to look at scientific knowledge as belief — as something you carry around in your head. Rather, what Popper wanted to say is: think of scientific knowledge as better seen as the abstract content of statements in our theories, as having a content that no one may have fully grasped or understood.

Popper also further argued that experts are fallible and should be open to criticism, and that knowledge does not justify unquestioned political authority.

Altogether, the result is that Popper offers us a middle path between, on the one side, the uncritical adulation of science, and on the other, a relativism that gives no special status to science. Popper thought that science was wonderful. He thought it was a human achievement of the highest possible order and cultural significance. But what he wanted to stress was its fallibility.

The Resulting Picture of Scientific Knowledge

How, though, does all this work? How are we to make sense of it? What Popper wanted to argue is that all of our knowledge is fallible — you can never tell what might need correction. He wanted to say, on the other hand, that we can aspire to truth and that we can aspire

to knowledge which is better than what we have had up to any given point.

How are we to do this? Well, basically, in Popper's perspective, we need to start from where we are. There are no certain foundations of knowledge on which we can build. Rather, we start from where we are, try to discover problems with our knowledge, and then try to discover something which will represent an advance on what we have had previously — a movement towards the truth.

What does this amount to in terms of a wider picture of scientific knowledge? Let me say something about that. Isaac Newton, when giving an account of his views, described scientific knowledge as being simply derived from experience — built on induction, on careful observation and careful generalization, and so on. David Hume, the Scottish philosopher, had argued that there is a fundamental problem about induction — namely, that it is unreliable. This is best illustrated by an example which Bertrand Russell gave, which I will Americanize for the current occasion. Take a turkey. Someone may have it in their yard, in a little hut. Every morning the turkey sticks its head out of the hole and gets grain. It gets fed. Sticks its head out, fed. Sticks its head out, fed. It builds up habitual dispositions and expectations — until Thanksgiving morning, it sticks its head out. And essentially this was Hume's point: namely, that we cannot be sure that these regularities will continue, and indeed he went on to argue that any attempt to justify our confidence by saying it has worked well in the past will turn out to be circular.

So there are big problems here, and what Popper says is: look, it is not a real problem for us that induction is unreliable in this way, because science does not work by induction. Science works by what Popper called conjectures and refutations — by our anticipating what things are like in a way that is not justified, and then learning where we have got things wrong.

Secondly, Popper said: look, if you take this view, then the production of science — the making of discoveries — is not a matter simply of observing carefully and so on. Rather, it can involve inspiration. And in a sense, Popper's account of science at its best can make the scientist something like the novelist, the musician, or the artist — someone who may have a real vision which they pursue and bring to our understanding of the world. But clearly, if people are operating in this way and what you are after is knowledge that will tell us what the world is actually like, these ideas must be put to the test. Ideally, perhaps, people will do this for themselves, but Popper stressed very strongly the way in which, if you do not do this yourself, other people will do it for you. If you make some claim about what things are like, then other people will check it out. And indeed, just because other people are going to check it out, each individual is likely to run through the obvious checks themselves, verify their experimental work, and put it through the most rigorous self-criticism they can manage before exposing it to the criticism that others will offer.

The picture that Popper offers is of objectivity as being a product of critical interaction with other people. He sees objectivity not as the product of someone who is particularly disciplined and keeps their imagination in check. Rather, he says, a scientist — and indeed anyone — can be imaginative, but attains objectivity as a result of the exposure of their ideas to criticism, so that we may always have something to learn from other people. He offers, in a sense, a social account of the achievement of objectivity.

Someone may, on hearing all of this, say: well, this is all very well, but what about ideas that are not testable? And what, someone might say to Popper, about your own philosophical views? They do not seem to be testable. Does that mean they are no good? One might respond on Popper's behalf, I think, in the following way. First, that

testability is certainly a virtue — if you have some idea, it is that much better an idea if you can suggest how it can be tested. But also, ideas that cannot be directly tested may still be important. They can serve as what Popper at one point called metaphysical research programs. By metaphysical, he here meant not directly testable; but he said these may offer us a picture of what explanations look like, and they may serve to inspire us. What he said about these things is that they may guide and inspire scientific work without themselves being testable scientific theories. It is important, though, he said, to make sure that they are open to criticism — open to a weaker form of intersubjective assessment, namely, you claim they can solve certain kinds of problems and then allow other people to assess them against that standard. And the same, I think, would be his view of the status of his own philosophy: it is not science, it is not testable, but it can certainly be put forward and criticized, and indeed it has been criticized by various other philosophers.

The Big Picture

What does all this mean for us? What is the big picture generated by Popper's work?

Well, first of all, Popper wants to stress that human beings have biological and social predispositions, that we interpret the world through theoretical categories, that we bring ways of understanding things to the world. We are not, as it were, a blank slate on which the world simply writes its impressions; rather, we are actively trying to see things, but we have biases and prejudices — and in Popper's view we cannot simply escape from these. But clearly — and this is something distinctive to his perspective — he says that while we interpret the world in these kinds of ways, our interpretations may

not be correct. It is therefore very important for us to try to get criticism of these ideas.

Indeed, Popper has said here that what is really important, and what is distinctive of human beings, is that we have at least the possibility of allowing our hypotheses to die in our stead. Let me offer an illustration of this. There was a scientific study which Popper sometimes referred to, about a frog. It depicted a certain species of frog as having built into its perceptual apparatus, in effect, the hypothesis that food consists of fly-sized objects that move around a bit. And so, in the presence of such objects, the frog would presumably stick its tongue out and spear the flies and eat them.

But clearly this hypothesis might prove to be incorrect. You could imagine this frog sitting there surrounded by flies which had, in a sense, anticipated what was going on and which remained perfectly still. If the flies could hold out long enough, you could imagine the frog eventually starving to death, surrounded by things that were actually edible but which, by the theories built into it, were classified as not consisting of food. Frogs in this situation are not in a position to take a critical distance to their built-in ways of understanding things and to say, well, perhaps, although we see things like this, I wonder if things are actually like that. And what Popper said is: look, the really important thing for us as human beings is to expose our ideas to criticism — to expose what comes naturally to us to scrutiny — so that we can discard bad ideas rather than dying with them, as the frog might in this particular case.

Popper again stresses that individual doubt or individual certainty is not necessarily a good guide to truth. He stresses intersubjective appraisal rather than the idea that one is an expert judge of whether one's own ideas are sound or not. What is really important for Popper is to learn from intersubjective criticism — to learn from

people who have not yet said anything as to whether the ideas are any good.

We can, however — and this again is something Popper stresses — undertake such criticism only in a piecemeal manner. At any one point we can submit one element of our knowledge for criticism, but we can only do this while taking for granted, relatively uncritically, various other things. We can at any one point say, I am starting to be suspicious of this — something which we have taken for granted up to this point — but then we have to take other things uncritically for granted while doing it. This means that there is no single element of our knowledge that cannot in principle be submitted to criticism, but we cannot do everything at once. We have to work at any one point against a background of things which we are tentatively assuming to be unproblematic at that time.

Popper sees us as being shaped by the products of human action — by theories and culture and so on. These are things which in some of his later writings he refers to as World Three, in contradistinction to the physical World One — the world of desks and tables and so on — and the subjective World Two, the world of our psychological understanding. Popper sees our own selves as being influenced by culture and shaped by ideas, and he sees these three worlds — the physical world, the psychological world, and this world of cultural and abstract objects — as interacting by way of human action.

Society: The Open Society and Its Enemies

What about society? Popper is here best known for a work called *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, which was written during the Second World War. The main ingredients of this were, first of all, Popper's ideas about knowledge, which I have already been talking about. Second, he was critical of elitism and of ideas about historical

inevitability. These latter ideas he criticized by way of a critical engagement with Plato on the one side and Marx on the other. So *The Open Society and Its Enemies* is both an exposition of Popper's own ideas and a work in which much of the critical argument is carried through by way of criticism of Plato and of Marx. His own social philosophy draws on some themes from Kant and the Kantian tradition, and also some themes from utilitarianism.

In practical terms, Popper wishes the state to be the protector of the individual by securing his or her liberty and also — and this is quite distinctive in Popper — their freedom from economic exploitation. So Popper stresses liberty and freedom, but within this he wants to say people should be protected from economic exploitation. There is a point of difference here between Popper on the one side and some people on the right on the other, who would agree with Popper with regard to other elements of liberty but might raise questions about this notion of protecting people from economic exploitation.

At the same time, in Popper's view, the proper concern of public policy should be the relief of human suffering. The pursuit, by contrast, of issues of well-being should be left to individuals themselves. Basically, what Popper says is that it should be the proper concern of government to try to address issues where there is flagrant injustice or where people are suffering. If you say, what about the finer things of life — what about opera, for example — Popper says: look, that is something where, if you think opera is wonderful and think it really has to be shared with a friend, it is up to you to go and do it — not least because, at the end of the day, it is open to your friend to say, I am only going to remain your friend if you promise never to play Wagner to me anymore. What he is saying is that there is genuine diversity with regard to these things, that at a certain level you can leave it to individual enterprise, particularly because you can tell other individuals to go away in a way in which

you cannot tell the state to go away if it is trying to look after your positive well-being rather than simply trying to overcome suffering and injustice.

One reason for this, he thought, is that you can obtain a much larger degree of agreement about whether someone is suffering than you are likely to obtain about what would make them most happy.

Such governmental actions — when the government is addressing issues of human suffering — are likely, though, to have unintended consequences. When the government does things, as when any of us does things, all kinds of things are likely to go wrong. And what Popper stressed was the need this creates for politicians and the civil service to get critical feedback from citizens, because citizens will be the people who discover where things are going wrong. Although what gets a bit tricky is that politicians and public servants will not necessarily like to hear that their plans and ideas have not really worked out too well.

Indeed, for Popper, each individual is valuable as a source of criticism and of feedback. He stressed this as an interpretation of democracy — the way in which one could see democracy as involving this possibility of feedback. He says that at a certain level this echoes a theme in Kant: there is a notion of the rational unity of mankind — people share in reason — but where Popper stresses very much that reason is to be interpreted in terms of the offering of criticism. And he says that this is a capacity that everyone possesses.

Assessment and Implications

What is one to make of this? Was it a big deal? Well, Popper's criticisms of Plato and of Marx led to quite a lot of ructions. As you can well imagine, the people who were keen on Plato said, well, Popper is not really sound on Plato, but what he said about Marx is

really very good. The Marxists said, he has really got Plato there, but his stuff on Marx really is not reliable. This, I think, means that what he has offered is controversial and interesting, that arguments about it are still going on, and I am not sure that all the criticisms of Marx have yet been fully worked through by those who still uphold Marxism.

What about his positive ideas? Well, on the one side, I think these are very reasonable sounding — when they are set out, it is difficult to fault them. But they have, I think, striking implications if they are taken seriously. Imagine, for example, taking seriously the issue of evaluating public policy. Whenever a politician or a public servant proposes something, you might ask: how are we going to evaluate whether or not this works? If someone is keen on educational reform or whatever, you might say, yes, it is a fine idea, but what about building into how things are done a genuine assessment of whether, on the one side, this actually does the job, and secondly, of what the bad unintended consequences are? Those people who have taken some of Popper's ideas in this area seriously have become very aware of the very limited extent to which this really does happen.

There are, I think, some reasons why this does not happen terribly well. The incentives are in some ways wrong. It is very difficult for a politician to stand up and say: yes, I came to you commending this particular policy, you gave me your confidence, we put it into operation, and I now have to tell you that it has been completely worthless. The danger is that if a politician stood up and did this, his opponents would never let him forget it, and he would never enjoy public office again. In a similar kind of way, public servants are likely to be very reluctant to admit that things have gone horribly wrong, and where they have, people simply expect them to lose their jobs for it.

I think this highlights a kind of difficulty with Popper's approach, which is that he paints a fine picture of what politics should be doing, but there is a real question about how it could actually do this. My own feeling is that things here may be a bit easier in the private sector — that Popper's ideas about criticism and feedback can be applied there a little more easily. One reads quite often, for example, about entrepreneurs — often people who have made a great deal of money — who may say: yes, I made several mistakes, and I was able to interpret market signals telling me I had got it wrong, I reacted to this quickly, and I moved on to something else. And people do not turn to these individuals and say this person is no good, he made a mistake. Typically in the culture, one recognizes that people have made mistakes and learned from them in a way that is much more difficult in political culture.

At the same time, I think one should not get too carried away by this. While one might see private enterprise as something within which the learning aspect of Popper's work can be put into operation a bit more easily than in politics, one also needs — particularly on big issues — a public sphere of intersubjective criticism and discussion about how things are working out. And if one thinks in practical terms, this is normally something that takes place around government. It seems to me no surprise that it is in Washington, D.C. that one has public policy institutes, one has debates, one has people testifying, and all kinds of big issues about society — about how tendencies are developing, about where the problems are and how they might be addressed — are being discussed. If one thought of government as being almost replaced by purely private activity, this sphere for wider public policy debate might itself disappear. So it seems to me that one can be somewhat torn here: Popper's ideas are attractive, but how to put them into operation becomes a bit tricky.

What about wider implications? It seems to me personally that Popper's work suggests some significant ideas for what one might call the contemporary preoccupation with knowledge management. There has been a great deal of concern in this area with putting information technology into operation in companies. People have not got the sort of return from it that they were hoping for, and they then think that what needs to be considered is how we handle knowledge management within companies — how we come to understand the kind of knowledge that is scattered throughout our organizations. Often when people look at this, they treat it as being simply a dispersal of information across the company. I think what Popper can lead us to understand here is that what is going on in companies is often better described as consisting of theories — perhaps ones which the directors of the company hold, the boss holds, and various other people hold — which other people in the company, if they were given the opportunity, might be in a position to significantly correct. This means thinking of knowledge in a commercial setting — knowledge within companies and enterprises — as consisting of fallible theories rather than simply as information spread around.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I would say this. Popper, I think, has striking ideas about science and about human knowledge. These lead to what seems to me to be an interesting and provocative view of the human situation. This interrelates with challenging ideas about how we should approach social issues, although these point, as I have suggested, in slightly different directions. And this, in turn, may lead to a rethinking of our ideas about political organization and about how we see and organize knowledge in the private sector too, and thus to developments in management. Accordingly, it seems to me

there is a very wide sweep to Popper's work, and I am very conscious in talking over this period that I have said only a little about the many challenging ideas to be found there.

So, if I could just remind you what we have done. After a few preliminaries and a placing of Popper, we talked about his view of scientific knowledge by way of a challenge to traditional ideas — to traditional ideas about how scientific knowledge is generated and about the authority of science and of people with knowledge. We then explored the view of scientific knowledge which results from Popper: learning by way of conjectures and refutations rather than induction, the importance of intersubjective criticism, and the social character of objectivity.

We then turned to the big picture — to Popper's picture of us as having biological predispositions, of ourselves as being influenced by culture, and again to the significance of learning and intersubjective criticism. We took this message — the emphasis on intersubjectivity and criticism — into the area of politics, and in this context explored how these ideas offer an interpretation of democracy and raise some interesting problems about politics and political organization. At the end I suggested these could be cashed out in various ways: as hopes for what might happen within politics itself, as ideas that might be interpreted and applied in the private sphere, but then as leading to the continuing problem of the public sphere and the general area within which criticism takes place.

And indeed, this notion of criticism is, I think, the key to Popper's work, because he sees us above all as being people who are rational in the sense of being able to offer criticism — but also, if we put our minds to it and think properly about our institutions, of being able to learn from the criticism of others. Thank you very much.

Lecture 76: Kuhn's Paradigm

Professor Jeremy Shearmur

In this lecture, I am going to talk about Thomas S. Kuhn. He lived from 1922 and died in 1996. Let me explain first of all just what the plan of the lecture is going to be. I am going first of all to say a few words by way of introduction. I am then going to turn to some of Kuhn's key ideas in his best-selling work, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. After talking about them, I am going to say something about Kuhn's own path to these ideas — how he got to the ideas for which he is best known. I am then going to turn to the issue of their reception — what other people made of them — and then finally I am going to turn to some of the implications of Kuhn's views and to some open problems to which they lead us.

Introduction

Let me then say a bit by way of introduction. Who was Kuhn? Well, he was an American historian of science and philosopher, and he was the author of the million-plus bestseller, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Now, a million-plus may seem no big deal — you may be thinking in terms of best-selling novels and so on — but for an academic book to sell a million copies, well, all I can say is I am an academic author, and my works are typically published at a level of around two thousand copies. So this gives you some feel for the kind of impact that he has made.

Kuhn's name may not be all that well known, but I think some of his ideas are — for example, the terms "paradigm" and "paradigm shift." You will often come across these used quite widely, and in this lecture we are actually going to look at what Kuhn meant by them. In

addition, the picture he gave of what scientists are like has been in some ways quite influential — namely, a picture of scientists as being relatively uncritical workers within a particular tradition or framework.

Kuhn's work led to a striking reinterpretation of science, and it has also led to much important and interesting research. But it also, I think, leads to some important and really quite thought-provoking problems, and with these we are going to be dealing as well.

The Structure of Scientific Revolutions

Let me turn, however, to really the heart of his views: *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. In order to appreciate the impact of his work, I think we need a picture of what people thought about scientists prior to Kuhn's writing, because to appreciate the impact of Kuhn's work we need to understand these other ideas by way of contrast.

One might sum up the kind of picture that people had of scientists prior to Kuhn's writing in roughly the following terms. First of all, a scientist is open-minded, and he or she is the sort of person who practices divergent thinking — someone with imagination who will look at things in different kinds of ways. Next, the traditional view is very much that what characterizes the scientist is that he or she bases their claims upon evidence. They may see the content of their ideas as having been drawn from experiments, or, if they had read Karl Popper's work, might stress the significance of testing. And in addition, science was very often seen as cumulative — the building of science being a little bit like the building of cathedrals, where one person lays the foundations and others build upon them. One might add to this that science was often seen as a kind of paradigm of rationality, a rational enterprise that people might look to for inspiration in other areas.

Now, in two talks — one given in 1959 and another in 1961 — Kuhn signaled his disagreement with this kind of picture. In the talk given in 1959, what Kuhn stressed was the role of convergent thinking and of tradition in science, arguing that it is not the case that scientists are open-minded — that there is a sense in which they are, in fact, closed-minded. And indeed, in the second talk given in 1961, the main point can be seen from its title: "The Function of Dogma in Scientific Research." From this sort of notion one can get some feel for the kind of contrast between the picture that Kuhn was offering of science and the more ordinary view of science as an open-minded enterprise.

What was going on? Well, Kuhn's ideas are set out in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Kuhn there offers an account of typical developments in the hard sciences — really the physical and biological sciences — along the following lines. He says: look, typically in the development of a scientific discipline, there is initially a period which is not really science. It is a period of pre-science. In these areas, there will often be diversity. There will be debates about fundamentals. There will be people championing different fundamental ideas. What is more, such teaching as goes on in these areas will again be concerned with debates and controversies between these different approaches. And indeed, Kuhn made the point that many of the social sciences still operate in this way. There is a sense in which — and I can illustrate it from my own background in political science — if students are studying political science, what they will often do is be introduced to different key works in different areas, to different contending approaches, and this is seen as the basis of education.

For Kuhn — and this is really what is distinctive — science proper begins when critical exchange of this kind stops.

Kuhn's view of a mature science is that it involves two things. It involves, on the one side, what he calls puzzle solving taking place within a paradigm. This activity of puzzle solving within a paradigm Kuhn calls normal science — it is the typical scientific activity. Let me explain these two terms in turn.

Paradigm. This term, for which Kuhn is best known, has a variety of meanings in his work. They range from a worldview — a sort of conception of what things are like within which particular sorts of science are conducted — through influential models or examples whereby a given piece of work may be taken as typical or exemplary scientific work, such that other people try to use it as a model for their work elsewhere. Kuhn also stresses what are the standard views and assumptions in any particular branch of science, and he talks about this in terms of a paradigm as well.

A critic of Kuhn's complained at one point that she thought Kuhn had used the term paradigm in something like twenty-one different ways. And Kuhn actually took this to heart, and later, in the light of this criticism, he said: look, I can clarify what I was talking about when using the term paradigm by splitting it into two separate things. On the one side, there is the notion of an exemplar — namely, a piece of work in a particular scientific discipline that then serves as a model for other work. This may be material that, when people are learning a particular science, they are introduced to as a model, and what they then have to do is essentially to replicate that kind of approach, applying it to different sorts of material. On the other side, there is something he termed the disciplinary matrix — this is really a view of the world, and indeed a view of what an explanation should look like.

What is particularly characteristic of Kuhn's approach is that on his account the disciplinary matrix — and indeed an acquaintance with exemplars — is something that people acquire as a result of learning

a particular scientific discipline, to the point where the disciplinary matrix may be something that they are not actually conscious of holding in a particular or distinctive way. It is what they come to take on board, as it were, as a result of having worked through the various examples and issues which are standard in that particular path of scientific education and in that particular scientific community.

The practitioners of these disciplines may not even be conscious of the fact that they hold particular views or particular expectations about things. The analogy here might be that for those of us who have grown up in an English-speaking background, if we have not come across people speaking other languages when we are young, we may not really be conscious of the fact that we are learning a particular language. Another example might be table manners: we may think there is simply one correct way to behave, without really being aware of the fact that other people do things differently. In a similar way, what Kuhn is saying — and this really feeds back into his notion of a paradigm — is that what people are acquiring through their education and their socialization is a particular way of looking at things which other people do not have, but where they may not be aware of the fact that other people do not share it.

Puzzle solving. This characterizes for Kuhn normal, or usual, scientific activity. What he depicts as the typical task of a scientist is filling out a paradigm. The paradigm essentially offers a kind of blueprint for how the world is to be understood, and the typical activity of scientists on Kuhn's account is filling this out — applying the paradigm to puzzles, to issues that have not yet been looked at, but under the expectation that the world can be understood as the paradigm suggests.

The term puzzle solving was used by Kuhn just to bring out the way in which the normal expectation is that the tasks people are working on within the paradigm are ones they would be expected to be able

to solve. It would not be just a mechanical exercise — just like, if one is trying to do a jigsaw puzzle and one cannot fit the pieces together, that basically shows one is no good at doing jigsaws, not that there is something wrong with the jigsaw. In a similar kind of way, Kuhn's picture of the normal scientist is of someone using a certain amount of creativity and hard work — not everyone is going to be able to do it — but if they fail, that is a black mark against the investigator rather than something that calls the paradigm into question.

Indeed, Kuhn also stresses the way in which, on his account, scientists see the world in terms of the paradigm — they see things through the paradigm rather than simply seeing things objectively. One sees the world through one's training, through one's expectations of the kind of explanation one is going to be able to produce.

However, over time, on Kuhn's account, there is gradually an accumulation of anomalies. It may just be the case that various people find they cannot actually resolve a problem they were expecting to be able to resolve in terms of the paradigm. Gradually these things accumulate. The fact that someone has not been able to solve such a problem does not knock the paradigm out at all. Rather, people just go on with the work, noting that this particular puzzle has not yet been accomplished. But gradually these unsolved puzzles accumulate. And what happens in the end is that people make variations within the paradigm, trying to find ways to accommodate these anomalies. One may look at the paradigm as being something like a shared language, but in this period when anomalies have accumulated, one may get to a situation where there are growing divergences between what different investigators are trying out — divergences in the modifications each is attempting.

This, in turn, leads on Kuhn's account gradually to a paradigm breakdown. What happens then is that one gets people looking at

books in philosophy, having debates about methodology, discussing their differences, and asking whether they should perhaps look to a different area for inspiration and for different kinds of ideas. This leads to diversity everywhere — to what Kuhn calls extraordinary science. This is not the usual science; it is something that happens when the paradigm is breaking down. But from this extraordinary science, from this flowering of various different ideas and approaches, there then emerges a new paradigm within which new sorts of normal science are set up.

What is crucial, though, on Kuhn's account is that the move from one paradigm to another is, as he describes it, like a so-called gestalt switch. You may have seen the best illustration of this: those pictures where there is a dark candlestick with two areas of white on either side, where it is possible either to see the dark shape as a candlestick with two bits of white space on either side, or to suddenly see that there is another way of looking at the same material — you may see it as two white faces, and what had hitherto appeared as the candlestick simply becomes the black space between them.

What one gets, and what is characteristic of this, is a sort of flip-flop back and forth. It is not the case that there is a kind of neutral experience of the world from which you can simply see one interpretation rather than another. Rather, you see things either through one interpretation or the other, and at a certain level the world itself actually seems to change when you go back and forth between them. And this, Kuhn said, is what is characteristic of a paradigm shift.

Indeed, he stressed the notion that there is what he called at some points incommensurability between different paradigms — namely, he thought that one could not make a rational comparison or appraisal between them. Rather, in a scientific revolution, you may find that there are some people working within the previous

paradigm and other people working within the new paradigm, and they really have no way of talking to one another. They may say: we do not understand why you are still bothering with those problems and those concerns — we are now doing something new.

Kuhn's Path to These Ideas

Let me now say a little bit, because I think it helps to illuminate what is going on, about Kuhn's path to these ideas — how he came to these viewpoints.

Kuhn himself was, by training, a physicist, and he received his PhD from Harvard in 1949. While he was there, before he graduated, he was asked if he would lecture on the history of science. When he was doing some research for this, he was struck by the real differences that existed in how Aristotle on the one side and Isaac Newton on the other treated motion. After studying this issue, Kuhn came to the conclusion that it was not really very helpful to see Aristotle simply as being wrong. Rather, what was going on was not so much that he was wrong but that what he was doing was different. And indeed, Kuhn's approach to the history of science became that what one needs to do is to be aware of the fact that the world was seen, and things were understood, at different times in quite radically different ways, and that the task of the historian should be to understand these kinds of differences and the changes across history. He was after a sympathetic understanding of these different views.

His concern then became with the different conceptual frameworks that had existed at different times in the history of science and with changes in these frameworks — in so-called scientific revolutions. Kuhn explored and set out some of his ideas about this in a book he published in 1957 called *The Copernican Revolution*. This told the story of the dramatic shift from a view of the universe in which the

Earth was taken as fixed at its center, to an understanding in which the Earth was in motion around the Sun, and later on to Newton's ideas. It is a story of dramatic changes in our understanding of the world — really, that the world seemed to be turned upside down — not just changes in science, but also changes in textbooks and in views of things more generally. Kuhn's view at that time was of science as increasing its scope through history, covering and dealing with more things through changes in these conceptual frameworks.

But he was concerned in the sense that his account seemed at odds with rather more usual views about scientific change, which tended to stress very much the role of confirmation or disconfirmation in the history of science. It seemed to Kuhn that scientific change was not just a matter of these kinds of things. Rather, he noted what he referred to as bandwagon effects, and changes in the views of the scientific community — things which were much more like changes in fashion rather than simply responses to empirical observation. And indeed, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* was his own later theory of how one should understand these changes and these phenomena.

Reception of Kuhn's Work

Let me turn now to the reception of Kuhn's work, because I think this points out in quite an important way both why Kuhn's impact has been so great and also why one finds somewhat divergent attitudes towards it.

On the one side, there were people who, one might say, had what I called before the traditional view of science — and this included many working scientists. Kuhn made, I think, an immense impact on them. First of all, he brought home to them the immense importance of theoretical perspectives, indeed of paradigms, and the role of

conceptual frameworks within science. This really led to quite a change in people's orientation if they had up to that point simply been seeing science as derived from observation. He also introduced the terminology of paradigm and normal science and more generally the kind of ideas we have been talking about. And he also emphasized the point that in science there is revolutionary and discontinuous change — changes in paradigms. This again came as earth-shattering for people who had not really been thinking in these sorts of terms.

A second kind of group reacted to him in rather different ways. These were often people who were specialists in the philosophy of science — some people who had been influenced by Karl Popper's work, but others who were more deeply engaged with discussions in the philosophy of science. The first thing to be said here is that a lot of what affected the first group really was rather old hat to this second group. Rather, what was new for them was that Kuhn seemed to be calling into question the possibility of scientific progress. His account of scientific change — including bandwagon effects and changes in fashion — seemed to call into question the idea of science as being, in some sense, a rational enterprise. And this is really important just because science had often been seen as the exemplar — one might even say the paradigm — of rationality, so that people in other areas, in society, in the social sciences, might be looking to the natural sciences to see what a rational approach was like, and Kuhn seemed to be calling this into question.

These people in the second group were also worried by the following. Kuhn seemed to be offering an account of scientific change as purely or largely a sociological phenomenon. Imre Lakatos, a Hungarian-born philosopher of science and a critic of Kuhn, said that on Kuhn's account, scientific change is a matter of mob rule. It seemed, as it were, that Kuhn's account of scientific

change made changes in science about as rational as changes in hemline, or something of that kind.

Kuhn also seemed to suggest that one could disregard problems, could disregard critics in science, because the key thing about treating the failure to solve problems merely as anomalies is that you can put them to one side and get on with your work under the assumption that someone will get them right a bit later. And indeed, conceptual problems being raised, claims about inconsistencies, and empirical problems — Kuhn seemed to say these could quite legitimately be dismissed so long as people were continuing to explore the paradigm.

It also seemed as if Kuhn was legitimating relatively uncritical normal science and rather dogmatic education within science. So there were some people who said they were rather concerned about scientists being taught almost by rote, working on particular models and how these are to be applied, not really thinking about alternative approaches or about the broader context of their work. Kuhn seemed to be saying that this is a necessary feature of science if people are going to get on and explore paradigms.

Indeed, what seemed to this group particularly worrying was not only that Kuhn said this is how science was, but also that Kuhn seemed to be saying that the account he was giving was an account of what science ought to be like as well. Clearly, if Kuhn's account was accepted as an account of what science was, one might say: well, we need to move in and reform it. But Kuhn was not saying that. He was saying: we need normal science, we need relatively uncritical scientific activity, and so on.

There was a third group of people, though, who reacted to Kuhn in quite a different way yet. These were often people working in the history and sociology of science — studying its history, studying its

sociology. They welcomed and indeed tried to take further than Kuhn had a purely sociological approach to science. They said: yes, what we have to do is to see science simply as the practice of a particular culture. People over here do things in this way; people over there do things in a different way. There is simply diversity. The older model of science as being particularly distinctive was by them rejected altogether.

And indeed, they took Kuhn to be questioning the image of science as a distinctive example of rationality. They saw and interpreted — and indeed welcomed — Kuhn's views as introducing a kind of cultural relativism.

Kuhn himself, I think, was a bit horrified by this sort of move, and he wanted to distance himself from it without, it seems to me, ever fully managing to explain — certainly to the satisfaction of the second group, the philosophers of science — how that kind of consequence was to be avoided as an interpretation of his work.

Implications and Open Problems

Let me indeed turn now to the issue of the implications of Kuhn's work and to open problems.

First, some problems about Kuhn's approach. Kuhn, as I have indicated, himself repudiated relativism, but I think he did not really make fully clear the sense in which there could, on his account, be progress within science. Some people said: well, actually there is a way in which one can understand this. It will take a little bit of explaining, but let me do so. They said: Kuhn's account is acceptable if one treats it as a so-called non-realist approach to science — namely, of saying that what science is doing is giving you conceptual frameworks or systems for classifying things rather than an account of what the world is actually like.

To understand what is at issue, let us consider the Copernican Revolution and the contrasting views of Galileo on the one side and of the Catholic Church — specifically Cardinal Bellarmine — on the other. Cardinal Bellarmine took the view that Copernicus' ideas about the Earth being in motion were, in a sense, no big deal, because he said: well, we just interpret these as offering us a new way of representing things and a new way of making calculations, rather than treating it as an account of what was actually going on — of the Earth in fact being in motion. Whereas Galileo, by way of contrast, wanted to assert that the Earth was actually in motion.

If one takes a view like Bellarmine's, then what may otherwise look a bit like relativism is actually not a big deal, because from this kind of perspective, paradigms and so on are not about the world — they are just ways in which we classify our experience. It is a little bit like someone changing a classification system in a library: there is no big deal about how one does that, it is simply a matter of convenience and so on. But if, by way of contrast with this, you take the kind of view that Galileo was taking — of scientists actually dealing with what things are really like — then an account like Kuhn's seems very problematic.

And so some people have said: well, this stuff about relativism in Kuhn is not a big deal, because one can take his paradigms as simply being conceptual frameworks, not accounts of what things are actually like. But even there I think there are problems, because if one does take that non-realist view, it still faces a difficulty that Kuhn's work raised — namely, the problem that has subsequently been referred to as Kuhn loss. What is this all about? Well, at one point in Kuhn's work he talks about the way in which through changes in paradigms one finds that some of the content of science, some of the details, are lost between one paradigm and another. And that is really not going to be acceptable if you simply want to

see stability in science as a matter of the accumulation of such material, with changes in conceptual frameworks superimposed upon it. Kuhn's views also run into all kinds of philosophical arguments about incommensurability and about ambiguities as to how his views are to be understood — about how to understand the relationships between the world and our perceptions of it — and there is ongoing argument about all of this.

In my view, for what it is worth, Kuhn's ideas are immensely fruitful and immensely exciting. They lead us to a concern with the actual history and sociology of science — a concern which some people have said is at odds with that of those who are interested in the appraisal of our knowledge, namely those people who have normative concerns, concerns with how things can be improved rather than just descriptive ones. I think, though, that we need both. I think we cannot get away from the need for a normative approach — for appraisal. For example, if we are trying to assess what we should make of some new approach — say, an economics-derived approach to politics — one cannot just describe; one has to appraise. At the same time, I think those whose concerns are with normative questions have to pay attention to sociological and historical issues of the kind Kuhn has suggested. I think the two views really complement one another. But this is not simply a matter of adding them together. At certain points they are at odds, and one needs to resolve the differences.

One can, for example, compare the kinds of views one gets in Kuhn's work and in Popper's approach, about which I have spoken in an earlier lecture. Kuhn takes a sociological, not a logical, approach to science. But there is surely a need for both. If one wishes to improve our knowledge, one must, as Edmund Burke would have stressed, start with people as they are. Next, Kuhn has stressed the importance of normal science, but for Popper, normal science is uncritical — it is

too ready to accept the status quo. Popper was also concerned about over-narrow, over-specialized scientific education, and concerned that Kuhn thought this was normal and acceptable. Those who follow Kuhn would say that Popper has to give an account of continuity in science and of the role properly played in science by tradition. From Kuhn's perspective, what Popper is stressing are things which are extraordinary, which occur only on a few occasions. Science, for Popper, is also a matter of aspiring to truth, and Popper is a scientific realist — he refers to Galileo and takes that viewpoint. Kuhn is somewhat ambiguous about this issue, and I think those who favor his perspective really owe us an account of what exactly one is to make of Kuhn in this area.

All told, it seems to me that if we are interested in improving things, we need to bring these different concerns together and resolve the problems at issue between them. On this, there is a lot of work still to be done.

Conclusion

To conclude: Kuhn has introduced a valuable new perspective into science. It has led to valuable work in the history and sociology of science. It has also challenged accepted views — both those of the uncritical layperson and practitioner, but also those of philosophers of science. And it has led to a whole range of fruitful and interesting open problems, which I think is one of the best things that a writer can do.

Just to remind you what we have done: after an introduction, I stressed and explained some of Kuhn's key ideas from *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. I then took you through Kuhn's path to these ideas — how he came to these views. I discussed their reception, and

finally we discussed some of their implications and open problems. Thank you very much.

Lecture 77: Quine, Ontological Relativism

Professor Darren Staloff

Willard Van Orman Quine is really the dean of contemporary American philosophy — its most senior, influential, and important figure. He is in some ways probably one of the most important philosophers of the twentieth century, in addition to being one of its most eminent logicians.

Trained during the heyday of logical positivism by none other than Rudolf Carnap, and steeped in its most powerful techniques and analytic tools, Quine has done more than any other thinker — ironically — to undermine the tenability of logical positivism and the philosophical tradition it claims to herald.

The background of Quine's work — the historical moment, as it were — was constituted by a series of setbacks to the positivist attempt to reduce mathematics to logic. Principally, these were first the persistent anomaly of Russell's paradox. Bertrand Russell had created a paradox by formulating the set of all sets that are not self-members. The paradox emerges when we ask the question: is that set itself a self-member? And it is obviously paradoxical — it cannot be answered satisfactorily either way.

But far more important, actually, was the development of Gödel's famous incompleteness proof. This was a rather technical proof involving manipulations in a language known as Peano arithmetic, which was used to model number theory. What Gödel did was construct a self-referential sentence in Peano arithmetic that stated, in effect: I am not provable. Therefore, if that sentence was true — if it was true and not provable — you would have to be able to prove that it is not provable, which is a contradiction. But if it is not true —

in which case it is not not-provable — then it is provable, in which case it ought to be true. The point of this was to show that mathematics ultimately could not be reduced purely to logic, and indeed, since Gödel's incompleteness proof, that project has really fallen into disfavor.

Quine's Attack on Logical Positivism

Well, Quine has directed his criticism at what I would call the foundational, or Kantian, elements of logical positivism. Positivist linguistic analysis and epistemology tried to constitute itself as a first philosophy in the sense that it sought to foundationally and unequivocally establish the meaning of expressions or discourse before the scientist could judge the viability or truth of such sentences.

The positivists thus tried to set limits to the range of meaningful discourse — hence Ayer's famous elimination of metaphysics. And they did this for the sciences by means of linguistic analysis, just as Kant had tried to accomplish the same project through the analysis of the conceptual scheme he thought embedded in the a priori categories of the human mind. We could in fact think of the logical positivists as projecting that conceptual scheme, which Kant found in the mind, into the very structure of language itself.

Now, this notion of language and the whole positivist program presupposed a rather peculiar conception — namely, that any language or theory possesses a determinate meaning, or contains fixed structural and conceptual features.

What we are going to do in this lecture is look at a variety of the ways Quine assaults this position: first, in a very important essay called "Two Dogmas of Empiricism," collected in the text *From a Logical Point of View*; then in a somewhat more powerful and more

sustained attack in the text *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays*; and then we want to look at what the implications of Quine's work are for the practice of philosophy and the nature of linguistic analysis.

Two Dogmas of Empiricism

So let us begin with the discussion of the two dogmas of empiricism. The first dogma we will be looking at is the belief that there is a basic and fundamental distinction — which we saw in Ayer — between analytic and synthetic truths. The second dogma is what is known as reductionism: the belief that every meaningful statement about the world is equivalent to some statement that is a logical construct of terms referring to sense experience. Hence, we reduce our physical discourse to discourse about sense experience.

The First Dogma: The Analytic-Synthetic Distinction

Let us look at that first dogma. According to it, an analytic sentence is true solely on the basis of meanings rather than facts. Such meanings, it is important to note, are intentional and not to be confused with naming or reference, which is extensional. So if I were to give you a proper name, the meaning of that is extensional — it refers to an object. If I were, on the other hand, to use a word like power, love, or humanity, the meaning of that is intentional, or, as we might also say, conceptual.

This is important for Quine because he is going to argue that intentional meaning is in fact a sort of replication of the old Aristotelian notion of essence. Aristotle defined man as a rational animal by arguing that rationality was the very essence of man. The linguistic philosopher will tell you that man is a rational animal because the intentional or semantic content of the word man is rational animal, as opposed to its extensional meaning, which might

be that man is a featherless biped. Every human you come across is a featherless biped, and all featherless bipeds on this planet are humans, but no one assumes that that is the intentional meaning — that merely has to do with reference.

Okay, so let us examine these analytic truths. They fall into two classes. The first class consists of pure logical truths, such as the following sentence: no unmarried man is married. The second class — the far more interesting class — is exemplified by another sentence: no bachelor is married. That is a sentence based on intentional meaning, because the intentional meaning of bachelor is presumably unmarried man. Now, we might argue that we could reduce that second sentence to the first — turn it into a logical truth — by replacing synonyms, i.e., substituting bachelor with unmarried man, to yield: no unmarried man is married.

Thus, the second and critically important class of analytic truths rests on this notion of synonymy, or sameness of intentional meaning.

Now, to say that such terms as bachelor and unmarried man are synonymous by definition is to put the cart before the horse, because the lexicographic work of dictionaries presupposes the notion of synonymy and applies it empirically to actual usage. We find that people use the word bachelor in the same contexts that they use the words unmarried man, and hence we define them as synonymous. So, aside from cases where you explicitly define your vocabulary in a technical sense, definition in general rests on this prior notion of synonymy.

How then do we analyze synonymy? Well, synonymy cannot rest on the notion of interchangeability of expressions, because such interchangeability does not distinguish between intentional or cognitive meaning and extensional sameness. Again, we can recur to that case of man is a rational animal and man is a featherless biped.

Thus, while bachelor and unmarried man are interchangeable because they presumably refer to the same objects, so too are creature with a heart and creature with kidneys — because all creatures that have hearts have kidneys to purify the blood that the heart pumps. Yet no one would assume that the latter is true by meaning, and thus synthetic rather than analytic. The point is that when we look at the relation between creature with a heart and creature with kidneys, we say that is true based on facts rather than on concepts or intentional meaning. And the result for Quine is that synonymy appears to be a dead end.

Now, we could pursue analyticity in another direction. Let us say that analyticity is defined as a relation between some sentences and a language or theory. Carnap, in fact, posited so-called semantic rules — especially in the paradigm case of artificial languages — which specify, by one means or another, all of the sentences which are analytic in a language L. You could simply list them on a page. The problem with this explanation of analyticity is that the word itself is used in the definition, i.e., in the semantic rule. If you simply eliminate the word analytic and say the semantic rules specify a certain set of truths in a theory, then you have simply replaced the unexplained word analytic with the equally unexplained phrase semantic rule.

Analyticity ultimately rests on the presupposition that there are some sentences in our language which are true and have no factual basis. And while this seems intuitively reasonable, Quine argues that no hard distinction can be drawn demarcating such sentences from their synthetic or factual counterparts. In fact, the claim that such a distinction exists is a dogma — a metaphysical article of faith.

The Second Dogma: Reductionism

Let us turn to the second dogma, that of reductionism, which is strongly related to the first and in fact supports it. You will recall the

verification theory of meaning, which presupposed that reductionism could show that statements or expressions are synonymous when they share the same method of empirical confirmation. So the relation between a statement and the experiences that constitute its empirical confirmation is said to be one of radical reduction — we reduce those sentences to the experiences which confirm them.

Such reductionism claims that every meaningful expression can be translated into sentences about our sense experience. We have seen this project throughout the history of empiricism. Locke, Berkeley, and Hume all tried to do this on a term-by-term basis, and as John Stuart Mill showed in the nineteenth century, they failed because not all of our words have straightforward reference.

The logical positivists thought they had found a solution to this. They realized that a term-by-term reduction would not work, but perhaps one could do it on a sentence-by-sentence basis — which is why they focused on the unit of the proposition, which corresponds in natural language to the sentence. The sentence is sort of the linguistic equivalent of a fact; one could think of a fact as a sentence-sized description of the world.

To pursue this project, Rudolf Carnap had tried to characterize or define physical objects in terms of a string of conjoined sentences about sense experience that took the form: quality Q is at a particular point-instant (X, Y, Z, T), where X, Y, and Z refer to spatial location, and T refers to time. And if you string enough of those sentences together — perhaps referring to this coffee mug: quality blue, quality warm, quality smooth, is at this particular location at this particular moment — then you would have defined the coffee mug in terms of its sense experiences.

But Quine points out something problematic: in that sentence, the locution is at remains undefined. And as a result, the project fails —

there is no sensory equivalent for reducing the phrase is at.

The dogma persists in the belief that for any synthetic statement, any empirical proposition, there exists a unique range of sensory experience that would either confirm or disconfirm that sentence. This implies that every sentence stands before the tribunal of truth and experience on its own.

Well, Quine rejects this on behalf of what he calls holism. Quine insists that our sentences face experience not each on their own, but as a whole, as a body. Indeed, we might think of this in terms of what he titles in one book as a web of belief, where the outside of our web is connected to our experience, and we weave the interior of that web to account for changes at the exterior. Perhaps a more useful analogy he draws is that of comparing total science — or the sum of our knowledge — to a field of force. The boundary conditions of that field are our experience. Anomalous experiences force readjustments among the sentences in the field's interior.

Nonetheless, the total field is sufficiently underdetermined by its boundary conditions so that any single recalcitrant experience leaves us with a great deal of choice as to which of our sentences or beliefs to reevaluate. When we experience an anomaly, the structure of our sentences and beliefs is such that we have choices as to which of our old beliefs to change.

We might think of our logical laws in this analogy as simply those sentences we place at the center of our field — and they are therefore those sentences which we are least likely or desirous to change. But no sentence is ultimately immune to revision. And while we must square the periphery of our field with experience, the chief considerations governing the arrangement of the interior of our field of force — or of our beliefs — are the conservation of belief and simplicity, especially of laws.

I would point out that the reason Quine stresses simplicity and conservation of belief is not only to give support to earlier pragmatists like James and Dewey, but also for good Darwinian, evolutionary reasons. Simpler explanations are easier to follow, and when something goes awry, it is easier to find where the error occurred.

Whereas the positivists had allowed pragmatic considerations to rule over our choice of synthetic beliefs or scientific theories — they never believed that science gave us absolute or logical truth — by destroying the analytic-synthetic distinction, Quine is opting for a far more thoroughgoing pragmatism. He is arguing that pragmatic considerations govern all of our beliefs.

And indeed, if we think of the early part of the twentieth century, when there was a real debate in physics over the nature of light — whether it was particulate or a function of waves — Quine argued that if we had not resolved that problem through quantum physics, we might have reached a point where we would have revised our most basic logical law, that of the excluded middle. When experiences are sufficiently recalcitrant, we even reweave the very interior of our web of belief.

Ontological Relativity

I want now to turn to really Quine's most powerful attack on positivism, and possibly his masterwork: *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays*.

Quine's thesis is that when we specify the entities in some theory or language — we will call that the object language, the language we are attempting to analyze — we do so by translating sentences containing those entities into another background theory or language, which we will call the meta-language, which is richer and

more inclusive. You could think of this in terms of the way you learn a foreign language: that would be the object language. You learn the reference and meaning of terms and sentences in, say, French by translating them into sentences in your home language, your meta-language — i.e., English.

Now, Quine is going to argue for a twofold ontological relativity. The reference, or ontological import, of an object language is always relative to the meta-language into which it is translated. In our case, the meta-language of last resort is our home language — good old vernacular English. So the fundamental entities of an object language will depend on both the meta-language we translate it into and the perspective we take in that language. We might think of this meta-language as serving as a sort of conceptual coordinate grid for interpreting the object language.

Radical Translation

Let us look at this in the case of what Quine calls radical translation — the translation of a language of which we have no prior experience. What Quine wants to demonstrate is that in such a case, translation will always, in some sense, be indeterminate.

So take the case of a field linguist who encounters a community of people who have never been discovered before and who speak a completely new and hitherto unmapped or translated language. How do we tap into that language? Well, Quine argues we probably begin with observation sentences — sentences whose truth depends on the moment of observation, such as: I am currently walking along this podium, or I am currently holding this coffee mug up. That sentence is true on the basis of observation.

So, we are with our tribal people, and we see a rabbit go by, and our host points to it and says: Gavagai! Gavagai! So we have tapped into the language — we have found our first term. Gavagai means rabbit.

Or does it? Quine's point is that assuming so presupposes that they share the same ontological structure that we do. In English, we think of the world as made up of three-dimensionally extended objects persisting through time. But perhaps they do not. Perhaps their interest is not in complete animals themselves but in parts of animals — perhaps they sell parts of animals to other groups — and so what they might actually mean is: there goes an undetached rabbit part.

Well, we have a way of solving that — at least in principle. We first have to learn the logical particles of the language, and then we point to one ear and say: Gavagai? Then we point to the next ear and say: same Gavagai? If they say no, we know it refers to undetached rabbit parts. If they say yes, we know they are not referring to undetached rabbit parts, and therefore we finally know that Gavajai are rabbits.

Or are they? There is another possibility. Suppose these are a people whose fundamental philosophy is Heraclitean — they are a process people, which is to say they do not believe in three-dimensionally extended objects. They believe in spatiotemporal slices. So what they mean when they say Gavagai is: there goes a spatiotemporal rabbit-slice. Or, better yet: it is rabbiting over there. Lo, it rabbiteth.

So how do we know the answer to what they are referring to? Such translation, Quine argues — and all translation, in fact — hinges on choices of analytic hypotheses for translating the new language into our familiar idiom. But such analytic hypotheses are always underdetermined by the facts of linguistic behavior, both among the speakers of the new language and by virtue of the underdetermination among the distinct analytic hypotheses we have produced. We could produce equally consistent but divergent analytic hypotheses that yield equally effective manuals of translation. You define Gavagai as undetached rabbit part. Someone else defines it as spatiotemporal rabbit-slice. A third defines it as good old-fashioned rabbits. Which is right?

What does our cagey linguist say? And Quine's great quip here is: a cagey linguist is a caged linguist. You cannot actually find the answer to that question — nor do you need to. What you need is an effective manual of translation, which means that when you want a rabbit, you will get one. And either of those three options for translating Gavagai will get you a rabbit when you use the word in the appropriate context.

We can, in fact, think of this in less radical situations, in languages we are already associated with. Take, for example, French. There is a two-word construction in French — ne...rien — which, separated by a verb, means nothing. Or does it? We could also analyze it as two separate words where ne means not and rien means anything, giving us not anything, or nothing. Well, which is right? Quine's point is that it makes no difference. As long as you can use it in a sentence speaking to a French person and be understood — which is to say, produce the correct response — then the two analyses mean the same thing for all practical purposes.

In Japanese, for example, there is another curious locution where, in a context where we would say five cattle or five cows, they actually have a word inserted between five and cattle which can either be interpreted as modifying the word five so that it can be used to count cattle, or as modifying the word cattle so that it can now be used to count, as we would with the word herd. Which is the right way to interpret that word? And again, Quine's point is that there is no right way. As long as you can purchase the correct number of cattle on a Japanese exchange, you are satisfied.

Implications of Ontological Relativity

So, what have we seen? The ontology of an object language is relative to the analytic hypotheses for translation into the meta-

language, and what counts as a logical as opposed to a factual truth will vary both with the meta-language and with the analytic hypotheses. The result is that the distinction between analytic and synthetic truths is again undermined, as is the distinction between metaphysics and science.

Now, some of these points had in fact been argued by Wittgenstein, who had claimed that we might think of language as following games, and therefore that there is a certain indeterminacy of translation which is not critical as long as we can play the games we want. But he thought that especially in our own home language, our home language had revealed our pre-systematic ontological awareness.

Quine's thesis is far more radical. He argues that even in our own home language, our reference can go inscrutable. How am I to know that you have not always believed in spatiotemporal slices, and that you have not always used proper names to refer to such things? And of course, if you have been doing that all your life, it really has no import, as long as you have been communicating effectively.

Which is to say, at a more formal level: we cannot fix the ontology of our own language, our home language, because there is no richer meta-language into which to translate it — there is no larger conceptual coordinate grid onto which to map the sentences of our own home language. So finally fixing the reference of our home language is like asking for absolute position or velocity, which we know, in the post-Einsteinian age, is in fact meaningless. Position and velocity are always relative, and so is reference, even in our home language.

Epistemology Naturalized

I want now to mention what some of the implications of Quine's theses are.

The result of these doctrines of ontological relativity is that philosophy as a foundational analysis of linguistic meanings prior to scientific study is rendered impossible. In fact, it is not even clear that there is anything left called philosophy which is distinguishable from science.

Therefore, Quine offers us another project to put in the place of traditional philosophy — particularly traditional foundational philosophy. And that is one which immediately brings to mind John Dewey. It is a project he calls epistemology naturalized — very similar to Dewey's naturalistic epistemology. This is an empirical, scientific study of how a particular species, Homo sapiens sapiens, uses its symbolic systems to erect scientific theories and explanations.

Such a theory or practice would obviously have connections to a whole host of different disciplines. In this way, philosophy would not be a judge standing above the other disciplines and prescribing what is and what is not valid. It would instead be a sort of handmaid running between the disciplines, drawing on the insights of each.

To engage in an epistemology naturalized would mean understanding experimental psychology and showing how it relates to such phenomena as the sociology of science we find in Thomas Kuhn, or the sociology of knowledge we find in perhaps other figures like the late Alvin Gouldner. It might connect to our understanding of cognitive psychology. It might relate, as well, to a whole host of other humanistic and scientific disciplines.

It is also worth noting that such a naturalistic epistemological account of how humanity builds up its knowledge would have to account for itself, as well as for the rest of our beliefs. Presumably, it would search for causal connections between language and the non-linguistic parts of the environment. I say non-linguistic because such a conception assumes that language is not a medium of representation that stands above the world — it is, in part, a piece of the world, and perhaps the most critical piece of the world in our cultural evolution.

Conclusion

So, what have we seen? We have seen first that the fundamental distinction between analytic and synthetic that Kant championed — and that served as the basis for a foundational understanding of philosophy capable of prescribing before analysis what science and truth consist in — is no longer tenable.

We have also seen that traditional Oxford-style linguistic analysis, as a way of understanding the structure of the world by finding it replicated in the norms and syntactical rules of our language, will not produce any metaphysical insight, precisely because such interpretation is always ontologically relative.

What we are left with is a conception of philosophy which is clearly empirical, clearly cross-disciplinary, and clearly naturalistic. One might, in that sense, think of Quine as taking the entire Anglo-American tradition of empiricism and naturalizing it — bringing it to a certain fruition and closure and leading it forward in a project which is deeply evolutionary and connected to our biological understanding of ourselves as a distinct, knowing, cultural species.

Lecture 78: Habermas, Critical Theory and Communicative Action

Professor Douglas Kellner

Our topic today is Jürgen Habermas, who has emerged as one of the most prolific and influential philosophers and social theorists of our era. Associated with the critical theory of the Frankfurt School, Habermas is now seen as the central figure in the second generation of the Frankfurt School, succeeding his predecessors Adorno, Horkheimer, and Marcuse in continuing their efforts to develop a critical theory of contemporary society and to develop a philosophy and social theory equal to the challenges of the contemporary era.

In particular, Habermas's writings on the public sphere and democracy, on language and communication, and on the major philosophical, cultural, political, and historical events of the day have won him global acclaim, and he is probably today one of the best-known theorists in the world, at least among intellectual circles, if not the general public.

Because of the tremendous magnitude of his publications — entire books have been published listing his bibliography alone — and due to the complexity of his thought, I am going to introduce different stages of Habermas's writing, depicting in sequence his writings of the 1950s and the 1960s, his linguistic and communicative turn of the 1970s, and his subsequent development of a theory of communicative action that he makes the basis of his philosophy and social theory, his moral theory, and his theory of democracy. In conclusion, I will sum up what I consider the major themes and significance of Habermas's work, but also some of their limitations.

Biographical Background

Jürgen Habermas is a German — he is still alive, so he is a contemporary figure whom I know personally quite well. He was born in 1929 in Düsseldorf, Germany, and grew up in Gummersbach, where his father was the director of the Chamber of Commerce.

While he was a member of the Hitler Youth as a young boy, the German surrender of 1945 was a liberation for him, and henceforth he would be strongly critical of anything having to do with fascism. So we excuse his Hitler Youth membership, since he has emerged as a major critic of German fascism.

In fact, I once asked Habermas whether the American philosopher John Dewey had any influence on him, and he replied yes. Dewey's strong notion of liberal democracy, of politics in the public, and of the active connection between theory and practice made a strong impression upon him when he was a youth after World War II. Habermas told me that after the war, American writings were in vogue in Germany. There were translations of Dewey's books, and he and his generation were very much influenced by the liberal democracy and the public philosophy in Dewey's writing. And I think it is fair to say today that Habermas himself has emerged as one of the major theorists and defenders of liberal democracy in our day, and thus can be seen as a successor to Dewey, who during his lifetime was one of the major representatives of democratic theory.

Habermas is also a very important philosopher, as well as a democratic theorist. From 1949 to 1954, he studied philosophy, history, and other topics in Göttingen, in Zurich, and in Bonn, and began publishing articles on various topics.

One of his earliest writings that I think is most interesting is a critique of the German philosopher Martin Heidegger, who had supported fascism and who wrote in a 1953 treatise, *Introduction to Metaphysics*,

that — and I quote — "National Socialism was an encounter between technology with its planetary destiny and modern man." Habermas saw Heidegger's view as a glorification of German fascism, of which he himself, of course, was severely critical. And he chastised Heidegger not only for supporting the fascist regime in the 1930s, but for failing to ever criticize it and, in his 1950s writings, for heroizing it, glorifying it as if this were some sort of world-historical event in the encounter between technology and human beings.

Indeed, Habermas would continue to criticize Heidegger over the years. While, like many Germans, he was impressed by Heidegger's 1927 treatise *Being and Time* — which many people consider one of the great philosophical treatises of the twentieth century — on the whole, Habermas thought that Heidegger promoted mysticism and irrational and obscurantist modes of thought, whereas Habermas himself defended Enlightenment rationalism, which he thought was a necessary condition of a healthy democracy.

Heidegger, of course, was a critic of Western rationalism and thought that the subject-object opposition within Western reason — where the subject comes to dominate and control the world — alienated human beings from the natural environment. Heidegger had a philosophy of Being where he wanted to let Being be, to let things appear in their presence, to reveal their meanings. And Habermas thought that this constituted an assault on reason and Enlightenment that he judged politically dangerous.

The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere

In 1956, Habermas came to study at the fabled Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt, Germany, and worked with Max Horkheimer and T. W. Adorno, who in retrospect are two of the greatest thinkers

of the twentieth century and with whom Habermas was closely associated.

His first major publication, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, was published in 1962. The text contrasted various forms of active, participatory public sphere in the heroic era of liberal democracy with the privatized form of spectator politics in a bureaucratic industrial society in which the media and the elites controlled the public sphere.

Habermas generalized from developments in Britain, France, and Germany in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and sketched out a model of what he called the bourgeois public sphere, and then analyzed its degeneration in the twentieth century.

The public sphere for Habermas consisted of organs of information and political debate, such as newspapers and journals, as well as the institutions and sites of political discussion, such as parliaments, political clubs, literary salons, public assemblies, pubs and coffee houses, meeting houses, and other public spaces where sociopolitical discussion took place.

Habermas claimed that for the first time in history, individuals and groups could come together, meet, discuss affairs of public importance, and criticize existing institutions and authority. They could shape public opinion, giving direct expression to their needs, their opinions, and their interests, while influencing political practice. This is what democracy is supposed to be: participation, where individuals participate in the public affairs of their societies, gain information, test out their ideas in discussion and debate, are exposed to other people's ideas, try to understand them, and reach consensus. And this is what happened, Habermas claimed, in the public sphere of the eighteenth century.

Consider pre-revolutionary America, where people started coming together in coffee houses, meeting in private homes or public spaces in Boston, Philadelphia, and the other sites of the American Revolution, where newspapers and journals critical of Britain were published and discussed. This, for Habermas, is the public sphere — that space that lies between the private institutions of the family and work on the one side, and the state, which is of course the major political institution, on the other. The public sphere in civil society is that space between the state and private life, and Habermas thought that it was the heart and soul of liberal democracy in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries — that it developed a space of institutions and practices where people could actually participate in public affairs, where they could organize against arbitrary and oppressive forms of political power.

Now, the principles of the public sphere, as Habermas articulated them in his book, involved an open discussion of all issues of general concern in which discursive argumentation was employed to ascertain general interests and the public good. Anything could be discussed in the public sphere, but rational discussion and debate was the norm. People had to give arguments, make proposals, and try to reach consensus. The public sphere thus presupposed freedom of speech and assembly, a free press, and the right to freely participate in political debate and decision-making.

After the democratic revolutions, Habermas suggested, the bourgeois public sphere was institutionalized in constitutional orders, which guaranteed a wide range of political rights and which established a judicial system to mediate claims between various individuals or groups, or between individuals and groups and the state. So Habermas is theorizing democracy in terms of a separation of powers — between the state, the judiciary, and the democratic public sphere — where you have a press, institutions of meeting,

political parties, eventually unions where people can organize, debate, and discuss issues of primary concern. Consider the American Revolution, where after the Revolution, the Bill of Rights gave us freedom of speech and assembly. Likewise, after the French Revolution, similar rights were established. So democracy was institutionalized after the American and French Revolutions in a constitutional order that guaranteed the integrity of the public sphere.

However, the central theme of Habermas's book — encapsulated in its title, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* — was the decline in the twentieth century of the vitality and the institutions of the public sphere. Like his teachers Adorno and Horkheimer in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Habermas produced an account of how the bourgeois public sphere had turned into its opposite, how democracy had become undermined, and how a revitalized public sphere was necessary to revitalize democracy.

Hence Habermas analyzed the transition from the era of liberal democracy, where people participated in a public sphere — think of New England town meetings or small towns where people come together to debate and discuss political issues — to the twentieth century, where people watch television. They receive politics through the media. Politics becomes a form of spectator politics. Big corporations take over the institutions of public communication. For many decades in the United States, there were only three television networks. When Habermas was growing up in Germany, there was only one channel of public state television. Likewise, in the early twentieth century, for instance, in Texas there were hundreds of newspapers, whereas by the 1950s, this had dwindled to one or two newspapers in the major towns.

So Habermas was analyzing the decline of the institutions of the public sphere — from a proliferation of newspapers, journals, books,

and articles that spread ideas and information, to control by the mass media. It was also a switch from a situation where people participated in political discussions and debate as active citizens, to a situation where people had become consumer citizens. They were consuming the media. They were perhaps more interested in consumer society and in purchasing things than in politics and in becoming citizens. So Habermas is analyzing the structural transformation of the public sphere, and thus the decline of democracy.

Just as Adorno and Horkheimer had analyzed how Enlightenment and democracy had turned into their opposites in the 1930s, Habermas argued that the public sphere too — which at one time was a space of participation and genuine democracy — had become a sphere of manipulation, where political parties and candidates try to manipulate you through advertising and spin doctors. We are undergoing an election right now in the United States, so we are getting bombarded by political propaganda. Still, in some states like Iowa and New Hampshire, there remain more institutions of public space where people can actually meet with candidates and have real discussions, as opposed to merely seeing sound bites on television. For Habermas, this constitutes a decline of the public sphere and a decline of democracy.

The Linguistic Turn: Toward Communicative Action

So Habermas's project is to revitalize democracy, but also to revitalize the norms of social critique — to develop a new basis for philosophy, for democracy, and for social theory that he will ground in language and communication. Let me try to explain how his analysis of the structural transformation of the public sphere and

what he saw as the decline of democracy led him to a new standpoint for philosophy and for social criticism.

Previously, Habermas and his colleagues in the Frankfurt School had appealed to the norms of Enlightenment — of reason, democracy, and freedom — to criticize fascism and what they saw as the decline of democracy and reason in contemporary societies marked by manipulation and domination by big corporations, by the state, by the big media. But in this situation, one could no longer simply appeal to norms of reason, freedom, and democracy, because they had turned into their opposites. Reason had produced propaganda and manipulation. Democracy had been taken over and colonized by the mass media. People were no longer participating in public affairs.

Hence, Habermas concluded, we needed to reconstruct reason and democracy. We needed to rethink what a living, critical reason would be and how we could recreate a genuine, participatory political democracy. This led Habermas to seek a new foundation for social critique and democratization, and his innovation was turning to language and communication to generate the norms of critique. His argument is that language itself contains norms that can be used to criticize domination and oppression, and that it is a force capable of grounding and promoting social democratization.

Habermas suggests that in the capacity to understand the speech of another person, to submit to the force of the better argument, and to reach consensus, there is a rationality inherent in language itself — in what he came to call communicative action — that could generate norms to criticize distortions of communication and help create a more democratic social order. Developing what he called the ideal speech situation, Habermas thus cultivated grounds for social critique and a model for more democratic social communication and interaction in his philosophy of language.

In other words, Habermas suggests that if we reflect on language and communication and on what constitutes an ideal speech situation, we will see that unconstrained communication involves allowing everyone to participate in discussion, allowing everyone to provide arguments, trying to come to an understanding of the other's position, and assenting to the force of the better argument.

Consequently, Habermas made his linguistic turn and turned to language and communication as a basis at once for social critique, for democratization, and for establishing critical theory on a stronger theoretical foundation — and to overcome the impasse he believed the Frankfurt School had become entrapped in. They had not really developed a way to revitalize democracy. They had no new model for democracy, and Habermas is going to offer one in his notion of communicative action.

The Theory of Communicative Action

From this perspective of developing a theory of communicative action — of analyzing the role of language and communication in the development of personality, in moral development, in interpersonal relations that are obviously mediated by language, in democracy that obviously involves communication, and in thinking through the consequences of communication in every sphere of life, from ego and psychological development and the construction of identity to morality and moral relations with others — Habermas developed a critique of contemporary philosophy and social theory that he claimed had failed to understand the importance of language and communication. And he developed a whole systematic philosophy demonstrating its importance and centrality for human life and for a democratic social order.

In his two-volume magnum opus, *The Theory of Communicative Action* — translated into English in 1983 and 1987 — Habermas claims that all major social theorists, including Marx, Max Weber, Durkheim, Talcott Parsons, and a list of other major figures, failed to develop a theory of communicative action and thus established their social theories on a problematic foundation. In other words, he argued that all the great social theorists of the modern era failed to understand that society fundamentally involves communication, that it involves social relations mediated by language. By failing to theorize language and communication, the great classical social theorists had failed to really analyze what society was all about.

In particular, he argued that these social theorists and philosophers assumed a subject-object relation in which subjects relate to objects either in the mode of domination — domination of nature, as in science and technology, where the subject through scientific knowledge and applied technology seeks to dominate the object — or the same model applied in politics and social life, where others are seen as objects of domination and manipulation. Obviously the welfare state sees its clients simply as objects to be administered and given certain welfare programs. In elections, politicians obviously see the public as objects to be manipulated into voting. So both in social theory and in social life, Habermas said, this subject-object relationship was the dominant one, whereas Habermas wanted to replace it with a subject-subject relation — or, in the Latin terms he used, an ego-alter, a self-other relation — that would be the basis of our relationship to the social world and to each other. We would try to cultivate self-other relations and genuine social relationships, rather than subject-object relations. And the way Habermas proposed doing this was to develop his theory of communicative action.

A Critique of Marx and Socialism

In fact, Habermas has a very interesting critique of Karl Marx and Marxism that we can apply to provide an analysis of the failure of socialism. Habermas argues that Marx's paradigm for social theory was production — that labor and production, subjects working on objects, workers working in a factory to produce things, was the model for society that Marx had, as opposed to a self-other relationship. Therefore, Marx could not really have a theory of democracy. Even though Marx gave lip service to democracy, he did not have a model for democracy, because he did not have a theory of communication, of relationships between human beings, of the importance of language and communication in constituting democracy. Marx did not have a theory of the public sphere, so that socialism did not really have a basis to develop a democratic foundation.

And in fact it is interesting that the Soviet Union followed the same production model of Marx as well as the subject-object model, both in the economy and in the polity, to the detriment of realizing what Marx conceived as socialism. It is not well known that one of the first things Lenin did after the Russian Revolution was to send agents to the United States — to Detroit — to study the factory system, the system of mass production, Taylorism, the assembly line, and scientific management. The same model was then instituted in the Soviet Union: Taylorism, assembly-line production, scientific management, big production systems. So the workers did not have democratic relationships at work. It was the same subject-object relationship, the same model of production as in the capitalist countries. And things were even worse in the state, where the workers in the Soviet Union had no political freedoms, no rights, and there was no communicative democracy. The state considered the

workers — the people — as objects to manipulate and control, just as in fascism.

So Habermas argues that these philosophical models are very important — that it is crucial to overcome the subject-object model and to replace it with self-other models that incorporate theories of democratization and theories of communication.

The Life World and the System

Another distinction Habermas makes — an important one for his critical theory of society — is that between the life world and the system, which he uses as a central key to analyze contemporary societies.

Habermas makes a distinction between the system, which is the economy and the state governed by imperatives of money and power, and the human life world that is governed by the norms of communicative action. Our everyday life is ideally governed by social relationships between people, by moral norms, and by interpersonal communication. And this, as we saw, was also the sphere of democracy in Habermas's book on the public sphere.

What Habermas is worried about in the contemporary era is the colonization of the life world by the system — a process in which the institutions of the system, of the state, of the economy, of money and power, come to dominate the life world. An obvious example is politics. Genuine democracy, on Habermas's analysis, is a participatory communicative relationship. But if you have a colonization of politics by political parties, by the mass media, by political advertising in which the media try to manipulate the public into voting according to image, sound bites, or rhetoric designed to induce voters to support particular politicians, you have a distortion

of democracy — what Habermas calls the colonization of the life world by the system.

In fact, think of television and the media themselves in terms of this colonization of the life world. Some figures indicate that the average American has the television on eight hours a day. Now, with the Internet, perhaps four or five hours a day. To the extent that you are interacting with these technologies and these media, you are not really engaged in everyday interpersonal relationships.

Communication, Morality, and Democracy

So Habermas wants a revitalization of democracy today through language and communication. He argues that moral development requires learning to take the standpoint of other people, to see things from other points of view, to try to reach a rational understanding of other people's positions, and to try to arbitrate arguments and conflicts through reason and consensus. Moral development takes place through language and social communication.

So you see the importance of language and communication for Habermas. If we want to develop our own personalities and constitute identities, we need to be able to use language and communication. If we want to constitute moral relations with others, we have to understand their points of view and respect them as people. If we want democratic politics, we have to participate in political debate where we assent to the force of rational arguments, try to understand other positions, and try to reach consensus.

Now, a lot of people have criticized Habermas for being too idealistic, for offering only an ideal of what democracy should be. And Habermas says: yes, of course, I know this is counterfactual. I know this is a normative ideal. I know this is not the way the world

works. I know that power and manipulation dominate in politics and everyday life. But we need these ideals. We need a democratic ideal. We need moral ideals. We need an ideal of undistorted communication — of an ideal speech situation — to reconstitute reason, to reconstitute democracy, and thus to create a more rational and genuinely democratic society.

Conclusion

So this is Habermas's project: to reconstruct philosophy and social theory on the foundations of communicative reason, and then to reconstruct and democratize society and politics on this basis. His is a vision in which the norms embedded in language and communication itself — the norms of mutual understanding, rational argument, and consensus — serve as both the critical standard by which to judge existing social arrangements and the positive ideal toward which a genuinely democratic society might aspire.

Lecture 79: Rawls's Theory of Justice

Professor Darren Stalloff

Published in 1971, *A Theory of Justice* by John Rawls is really the fruit of several decades of research — research across a wide variety of disciplines beyond merely philosophy, including most of the social sciences and humanistic disciplines as well.

It is an important book, and one that is immensely influential, because it represents an attempt — and probably the most important attempt to date — to give a kind of moral or philosophical foundation, as it were, or charter, to our ideals of constitutional social democracy as they have emerged in the contemporary West. Which is to say, Rawls attempts to show us the philosophical support for, and the premises from which we can deduce, the principles that legitimate the practices of modern social democracy.

While most people accept this system of government and the social policy associated with it as the best we have available, at least to date, moral theory has not kept pace with political and institutional development and practice. Thus, before Rawls, most philosophers who tried to give philosophical support to our Western social democratic practices did so on the basis of utilitarian principles. And as we shall see, Rawls argues that this was, and remains, a problematic approach to justifying such practices. This is because utilitarian principles will give us some sense of a procedural justice, but not the substantive sense of justice and fairness that underlies our contemporary notions of social democracy.

Rawls's text also occupies a very interesting place in the history of philosophy. As I have mentioned, it incorporates a wide variety of disciplines, and it also incorporates a broad range of moral positions

drawn from the traditional history of philosophy. For example, Rawls draws on Aristotle, Aquinas, Hume, Mill, and a host of others. But I would urge that central to his thinking are two critical strains.

The first is the social contractarian interpretation of political society. We saw this strain really emerge with Hobbes and Locke, and finally culminate in Rousseau. And we will see that it is an absolutely critical intellectual premise for Rawls's theory.

The other element is that Kantian goal for universal and rational moral principles, which Kant had characterized as the categorical imperative — a categorical imperative that forces us to think of society not as an instrumental association of interests, but rather as a kingdom of ends in which each individual is, as it were, an autonomous entity imbued with dignity and rationality, and worthy of respect.

So we will see that these are really the two central threads united in Rawls's work: social contractarianism and Kantian universalism.

The Problem of Justice as Applied to Society

Now, Rawls's particular concern is with the problem — especially the moral problem — of justice, as it is applied to society. So we are going to see, first, how he formulates the problem of justice as applied to society. Then we will see his application of a particular interpretation of that formulation, what he calls the principle of justice as fairness, or the system of democratic equality. And then, time permitting, we may examine some of the issues raised by such a doctrine and some problems associated with it.

So let us return first to that basic question: how do we formulate the problem of justice as applied to society — or social justice? And this, for Rawls, is critical, because — and I quote — "justice is the first

virtue of social institutions as truth is of systems of thought." It is the touchstone by which we evaluate all social institutions. Rawls's goal is to find the best set of principles for justice, which will comprise a universally recognizable theory.

Perhaps it is best to begin by defining what we mean by society. Rawls means by a society a relatively self-sufficient association of persons who recognize shared rules of conduct. Social justice, then, would be a set of principles that determine and legitimate the division of advantages and primary social goods within a society. Primary social goods include things like rights and liberties, which are obviously political, but they also include opportunities and power, as well as economic phenomena such as income and wealth.

So the goal of social justice is, as I said, to legitimate — to make morally acceptable — the division, and sometimes the unequal division, of these advantages and primary social goods in any given society. Its primary concern is in fact what Rawls calls the basic structure of society, which is comprised of, on the one hand, the political constitution, and on the other, the major social and economic institutions of that society.

This is critical because, according to Rawls, it is these institutions that often generate inequalities of advantage — that is, they favor some social positions over others. And it is the task of a theory of justice both to judge these inequalities and, perhaps, if they are acceptable, to legitimate them, to show why they are morally fair and just. The goal is to characterize the rules for a well-ordered society — a society designed to promote the good of its members and regulated by a publicly shared conception of justice.

Reflective Equilibrium

Now I want to briefly discuss the epistemological basis of this project, because in some sense Rawls has stated that the principles of justice — the basic rules from which we deduce legitimating principles for particular institutions — must be absolute and universal. But they are not conceived, at least by Rawls, as necessary truths, or as deducible from necessary truths. This is certainly not an a priori system of inferences.

Instead, Rawls offers a different method of moral reasoning, which he calls the quest for reflective equilibrium. In practice, that means that we seek principles that will verify what he calls our strong moral views — moral views about which we are fairly certain. In contemporary America, these would be views like: religious intolerance is undesirable; racism is unjust. We then try to find principles from which we can deduce and thereby support those views. And once we have principles which allow us to infer those views, we can begin to apply those principles to other cases in which we have less certainty, and thereby arrive at fresh insights. This is the whole quest of reflective equilibrium. It is not an absolute standard; it is one that arises from conserving our strongest and most clearly held moral convictions.

The Original Position

The key to Rawls's formulation of these principles is something he calls the original position. The simplest way of putting it is that the original position is a refined equivalent to that classical notion we found in Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau of the state of nature.

So the original position is a situation in which we find ourselves in a community that has not yet formulated itself into a society. As such, we are in a position to publicly, as a collection of individuals,

formulate the principles of justice that will inform and legitimate our social and political institutions and practices. That is our original position.

Obviously, this is not an actual historical situation. It is clearly a theoretical device — what we might call a hypothetical thought experiment — that allows us to clarify our basic assumptions and convictions. It also allows us, ideally, to formulate universally agreeable principles of justice. And here again we see that Kantian element: we seek principles of justice which are not simply relative to one's social position or to a particular society, but which are in fact universalizable. And we will see that because of the particular conditions of the original position — specifically, that they are fair — they generate a theory that can be characterized by the phrase justice as fairness.

So what are these conditions? There are basically two: one called the veil of ignorance, and the other a critical assumption of rationality and rational self-interest on the part of each person in the original position.

The Veil of Ignorance

The veil of ignorance states — and this is critical to our formulation of the original position — that each person in the original position should not have any knowledge about what social position they will subsequently occupy. Similarly, they should be ignorant of what their natural talents are or will be. Moreover, they must also be ignorant of what plan of life or life goals they will have.

In short, the veil of ignorance ensures the fairness of the procedure for judging our principles precisely because we will not pick principles that benefit our own unique social position, goals, or talents, since we do not know what those will be. That is not to say that persons in the original position have no knowledge whatsoever.

Rawls believes that each person in the original position should be accorded full access to all of our general laws of moral and human psychology, economics, political science, history, sociology, and the like. So all of the social sciences and perhaps even the humanistic disciplines are, as it were, at the fingertips of the persons in the original position. They are simply ignorant of their own social position, powers, and propensities.

Because the agents in the original position are rational, they can, according to Rawls, be expected to universally and unanimously agree to the principles adopted. This is because — and here again we recur to Kant — they have no heteronomous interests. Precisely because no one knows what status they will have in society, or what their talents or dispositions will be, they have no prior agenda. Thus there is no motive to promote a particular agenda, or to bargain, or to form coalitions. The ideal is a universal and unanimous agreement. And this gestures both toward the eighteenth-century Kantian notion of autonomy — of a self-legislating agency — and it also gives some concrete substance to Habermas's idea of an ideal speech situation, where the absence of particular private interests leaves reason untrammeled and produces no distortion of our speech acts.

Rationality and Self-Interest

The other critical assumption for the original position concerns the rationality of the parties. This assumes that each agent is mutually disinterested from the others — which is to say, their only interest is maximizing their own expectations of primary social goods: income, wealth, opportunity, rights, and liberties.

The principles they adopt concerning the basic structure of society — those fundamental political, economic, and social institutions — will be characterized by five features. First, they must be general, because every agent does not know what his or her position will be. Second,

they must be universal — that Kantian element — because they are the dictates of reason, not of particular historical circumstances. Third, they must be public, and here again I recur to that Habermasian theme of an ideal and public speech situation, so that they can ensure the social solidarity that principles of justice are meant to help create and foster. Fourth, they must be ordered, which is to say the principles must form a lexical hierarchy — we must know which are more important than others, and this is critical for adjudicating different interpretations of those principles. And finally, they must be final, in the sense that once agreed to or stipulated, they cannot be changed. This is necessary to ensure the seriousness of the deliberation, that it is not undertaken in a lighthearted fashion.

The Two Principles of Justice

All right, so that is the structure from which Rawls wants to argue for particular principles of justice that he thinks would emerge from such an original position. And in fact Rawls will argue that there are exactly two principles that would emerge in such a situation as the basic agreement we could expect from rational persons in the original position who are, remember, attempting to maximize their expectation of primary social goods and minimize social injustice.

The first principle states that — and I quote — "each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive basic liberty compatible with a similar liberty for others." And here we see clearly the sort of libertarian principle expressed in our Bill of Rights and in most of our philosophical writings on liberty. These are, in fact, the basic liberties of political society and constitutional government.

The second principle states that any social and economic inequalities must be, first, to everyone's advantage — inequalities must benefit every member of society — and, second, such social and economic

inequalities must be attached to positions and offices that are equally open to all. So we cannot have a caste structure. And of course it is the second principle that deals with income differentials and differential authority — the primary social goods of economy and society.

Now, note that these two principles are lexically ordered, meaning there is a hierarchy between the two: the first is prior to the second. Thus, according to Rawls, we cannot exchange our basic liberties and fundamental freedoms for primary social goods such as more income or higher status.

Given this formulation, the test case — the benchmark — for all principles of justice and social arrangements is the condition of complete political and socioeconomic equality. That is the touchstone by which all subsequent social systems must be judged. Therefore, any proposed inequality must in fact represent an improvement in the scheme for every representative person or prospective social position. All inequalities that we propose must actually improve the status of everyone in a society relative to that original benchmark of complete political and socioeconomic equality.

Four Interpretations of the Second Principle

Now, the critical issue for Rawls is that the second principle can be interpreted in a variety of ways, depending on how one reads the phrase "equally open" and the phrase "everyone's advantage." For Rawls there are basically four variants, depending on whether those phrases are interpreted according to what he calls the principle of efficiency — which means interpreting them with the goal of maximizing the deployment of talents in a society — or the difference principle, which demands that we adopt as our

perspective the social position of the least advantaged representative person, always the lowest social position, when thinking about social arrangements.

The System of Natural Liberty

If we look to the second principle through the lens of efficiency, we arrive at what Rawls calls the system of natural liberty. This is essentially what we mean by a free market society, where positions are open to those willing and able to strive for them. This gives us a purely procedural sense of justice, in which justice resides in the universally recognized and honored procedures for advancement and procuring advantages — procedures which are open to all.

The problem with this system is that it does not limit arbitrary influences. For example, the inheritance of wealth certainly gives an unfair advantage to those with wealthy parents over those without. Similarly, with regard to academic or intellectual endeavor, it gives an arbitrary advantage to those with higher intelligence, which is, in effect, a genetic lottery. Natural ability is not something one earns; it is simply the luck of genetic draw, which is, of course, morally arbitrary.

The System of Liberal Equality

So we could improve this interpretation of the second principle by supplementing it with what Rawls calls the system of liberal equality. Here we go beyond mere legal equality to require that there be a fair equality of opportunity for all seeking advantageous positions and careers, so as to compensate for those with equal talents but disadvantaged backgrounds.

We can think of a host of such cases. For example, the institution of public schools and libraries is meant to give more equal access to those whose parents are not wealthy enough to send their children to elite private schools or to purchase large numbers of books. We

might think of scholarships to elite educational institutions for the disadvantaged — those who have the ability but lack the resources to pursue a prestigious education. We might think of job training for those lacking the resources to otherwise enter apprenticeships or systems of vocational study.

While this does in fact limit the social contingencies of birth within a social class, it does nothing to eliminate the other source of unfairness under the efficiency principle — the genetic lottery of intelligence. Nor does it necessarily do much to overcome certain family constraints. For example, if your parents were academics, it is more likely than not that you will have been surrounded by books from an early age, and that gives an unfair advantage over someone from a family that might not be similarly educated.

The System of Natural Aristocracy

Now let us interpret those principles not by the principle of efficiency but by the difference principle, which, you will recall, said we should think about the deployment of these principles as they would affect the least advantaged person in society. The first deployment of the difference principle allows us to arrive at something Rawls calls the system of natural aristocracy. This contains the formal equality of opportunity found in the system of natural liberty, but also stipulates that the advantages of those with greater endowments are limited to those that further the good of the poorer sections of the community. Which is to say, the system of natural aristocracy is a sort of meritocratic noblesse oblige. It does not escape the problem of social contingency — the inheritance of wealth or intelligence, which are morally arbitrary — but it does ensure that those who attain more advantageous positions do so in ways that further the good of those at the bottom of society.

The System of Democratic Equality

Rawls believes he can improve even this principle further with what he calls the system of democratic equality. This is the preferred interpretation of the two principles according to the use of the difference principle. It holds that, like natural aristocracy, social and economic inequalities must yield the greatest benefit to those least advantaged, and that such inequalities must be attached to offices that are open to all with a fair equality of opportunity — secured through institutions like public libraries and scholarships.

Thus, the advantages and greater expectations of primary social goods enjoyed by, for example, entrepreneurs who will certainly have higher incomes, must benefit unskilled workers through more jobs and economic growth. If we are to allow businesspeople to have higher incomes than their employees, that can only be justified by producing dynamic economic growth which benefits all members of society, particularly those who are relatively disadvantaged. And this is the only way to ensure that such inequalities are, in fact, socially just.

Virtues of Justice as Fairness

Now, this system of democratic equality — which we might also call the principle of justice as fairness — has, at least in Rawls's mind, several important philosophical and practical virtues that commend it over the alternatives.

First, the system of justice as fairness precludes the construction of a callous meritocracy or technocracy, because it treats natural talents and abilities not as boons for the individuals who happen to possess them, but rather as social resources to be deployed for the advantage of the least fortunate. If an increased educational allotment for the most gifted brings this about, then it is socially just.

We might think of scientific think tanks and research institutions, which certainly privilege those who win the genetic lottery that Rawls described, but ultimately serve to benefit those least advantaged by creating greater technological advances, greater productivity, and perhaps better health. At the same time, it benefits those who are most advantaged by giving those least advantaged a reason to continue in their social cooperation and their productive roles. It therefore legitimates the structure and makes it sound, strong, and cohesive.

Second, the difference principle gives substance to our ideal of fraternity — which is, in fact, the most ignored element of the famed French revolutionary triumvirate of liberty, equality, and fraternity. Fraternity means that, as in a family, we do not want advantages that come at the expense of our less fortunate brethren.

Thus, the two principles comprising the system of democratic equality, or justice as fairness, together embody our ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity. Liberty is contained in the first principle, that we have the maximal amount of liberty consistent with that of others. Equality is found in both the first principle and the second principle's stipulation of fair opportunity. And fraternity is encapsulated in the difference principle's requirement that we justify any system in the eyes of those least advantaged.

Justice as fairness also helps us avoid the problems that arise from using utility as the moral-philosophical foundation of constitutional social democracy. Utilitarianism seeks to maximize the pleasure or usefulness of society as a whole, but this allows us to sacrifice the interests of a minority if doing so yields larger benefits to a majority. The most troubling test case of this would have been chattel slavery in nineteenth-century America, where a minority was oppressed to create greater pleasures for the majority. Moreover, utilitarianism also fails to prohibit our bargaining our liberties away for the sake of

an increased allotment of primary social goods — an issue famously raised by Aldous Huxley in *Brave New World*, where people surrendered their freedom for more pleasure.

Critical Problems with the Theory

In the time I have remaining, I want to examine some of the critical questions that Rawls's doctrine raises, some of which I think are potentially problematic for the theory as a whole.

First, the theory assumes a univocality of reason and social science, which I would urge is an extremely Kantian assumption. It assumes that human rationality is the rational prudence of homo economicus — the person who maximizes returns and minimizes risks. This rejects the reality that many people reason differently, that they prefer games of chance and gambling. From a Rawlsian point of view, something like a lottery is simply a stupidity tax, a tax on those who lack rationality. But in fact some people calculate differently and think that the rewards so far outweigh the small risks that they are willing to take their chances. And we saw the same sort of reasoning in Nietzsche as well, who argued that sometimes, if you want to maximize pleasure, you have to risk a maximization of pain.

The assumption of univocality also presupposes that there are generally agreed laws of social science — that we agree on the laws of economics and sociology — because if there are not, we could never achieve unanimity in that original position. For example, if we cannot agree on the validity of the Laffer curve, then we cannot agree whether supply-side economics satisfies the two principles of social justice. In fact, it is precisely because we do not agree on the laws of social and moral psychology that we can argue for both contemporary liberal and conservative policies on the basis of the principle of justice as fairness. And I think in contemporary America

we find that this is just the case. Indeed, if we were to adopt a Marxian economics as the most valid social science, we might argue that in an advanced capitalist economy like our own, there are in principle no inequalities that are justified, even according to the two principles Rawls proposes.

A second issue I would like to raise is that, as in all universal and absolute moral theories, justice as fairness is ahistorical. It fails to account for the fact that our codes of justice might indeed be relative to culture and social circumstance — an insight we have seen in Vico, Hegel, and of course in Marx.

Finally, the theory of justice proposed by Rawls is fraught with what I would call methodological individualism, which means that we judge social arrangements based on the expectations or interests of individuals — and in particular those individuals who are least advantaged. But we saw with other social theorists, like Hegel for example, that we might think about collective subjectivity as the real agency — the nation, the culture.

Let me give you an example. The expropriation of tithes and the raising of indulgences by the Catholic Church in the early Renaissance were used to patronize figures like Michelangelo, Raphael, and Donatello. It is important to note that these expropriations of income by the papacy did not, in fact, increase the stock of primary social goods of the peasants and people who paid indulgences. So Rawls would have to conclude that this was unjust and should not have been done. And that strikes me as counterintuitive. We must believe at some level that, although it may not have benefited those who paid for it, the culture was ultimately enriched by the creation of Renaissance art and monumental architecture.

And indeed, the same could be said for the inequalities that were used to generate most monumental works of high culture throughout history, and even much of our contemporary national endowment for the arts. Since most of us think these works are worth their social cost, perhaps this is a case of our reflective equilibrium becoming upset and forcing us to re-examine the two principles.

Lecture 80: Derrida and Deconstruction

Professor Lou Marcos

In this lecture, we shall consider the origins of deconstruction in the theories of Derrida, particularly as they were first presented to America in his famous — or perhaps infamous — lecture, "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences."

Logocentrism

Jacques Derrida reads the history of Western metaphysics as a continual search for a logos, or originary presence. Indeed, until the modern period, most of the great Western philosophers have been logocentric in their thinking. You may well be asking yourself: what is logocentrism, and what is a logos? Let me explain.

Logocentrists consider meaning to emanate finally from some logos, or originary source, that is pure and undefiled. In other words, logocentrists believe there is an origin to everything, and that origin is, as it were, up there in the heavens — pure, eternal, and unchanging.

The archetypal example of a logos is Plato's concept of the Forms. We are all familiar with that. Plato believed that up in the world of being were the ideas, or origins, of all of our earthly ideas. So down here we have beauty with a small b. But that beauty is a reflection of Beauty with a capital B — the true idea, the essence, the Form, the logos of beauty that exists in the heavens. So once again, if you are a logocentrist, you believe there is a kind of divine, eternal origin to all the things that are in our world.

Now, other logocentrists believe in the logos, but give it a different name. John, in the Gospel of John, calls it the Logos, by which he refers to Christ, the incarnate God. St. Augustine speaks of the Trinity, the Triune God, as the logocentric origin of everything. Descartes changes it and speaks of the cogito — the "I think, therefore I am" — as the logos, the origin of everything. For Locke, it is not even supernatural; it is the natural laws that run the cosmos or the universe — that would be his logos. Hegel has the Idea with a capital I. Again, they use various different names, but in all of their theories there is a belief that there is an origin, that it is pure, that it is the source, and also the measure or touchstone against which we can assess everything in our world.

Sometimes, in the work of epistemologists like Kant, this logos becomes internalized and is known as the absolute self or transcendent ego. In other words, Kant says: well, there is a logos, but it is not up there — it is inside of us. My own consciousness, my own ego, is the logos, the source and origin of everything. But whether it is up there or within us, there is still a logos — an origin that is pure and undefiled, and that serves as the measure and touchstone of everything.

Incarnation and Binaries

Most logocentric philosophers provide for the expression of this logos through a sensuous incarnation into the physical, material world. The best example of this is, of course, the Christian idea of the Incarnation — the belief that the eternal, invisible Father expressed himself when he took on flesh in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. But we can use the word "incarnation" in a more generic, and not necessarily religious, sense. An incarnation is any time that logos,

which is generally invisible, takes on physical, material form so that we can see it and perhaps even interact with it.

Now, because of this idea — this desire for the logos to become incarnated — most traditional metaphysicians believe that the final function of philosophy, theology, aesthetics, and even linguistics is to point back to meaning. In other words, disciplines like philosophy are finally a means to an end, a means to achieve some higher goal. Many people gravitate toward philosophy because they want to go on a journey that will take them to the logos, to Truth with a capital T and Meaning with a capital M. And so for many philosophers, that is the purpose of their journey.

Let me tell you one other aspect of logocentrism that is important. Logocentrism generally expresses itself through binaries. A binary is a set of two related terms in which the first term — perceived to be closer to the logos — is privileged over the second. Indeed, the second term is often seen as a falling away from the first.

The best way to explain this is to return to the most famous and most defining of binaries, that of Plato. Plato says the binary is the Form and the imitation — the idea and the image. As we have seen before, the first term would be Beauty with a capital B, existing in the world of being. The imitation or image would be beauty with a small b, existing in our world. It is not that beauty with a small b is unimportant, but the first term, the Form, is always privileged over the second. That is how binaries work.

There are many examples of binaries. Another would be logos — meaning word or logic — which is always privileged over the Greek word praxis, meaning acts or experiences: logos over praxis. Speech, traditionally, has been privileged over writing. Speech was considered pure, closer to the logos. God, after all, spoke the world

into being. Speech is pure. Writing, somehow, is a little dirty — when we write something down, we are moving farther from the truth.

Some other binaries would include intellectual versus physical, being versus becoming, conscious versus unconscious, essence versus existence, and rational versus emotional. In all of those cases, that which is closer to perfection and to the eternal — that which is unchanging — is always privileged over that which alters or decays. Our soul is considered closer to the logos because it is unchanging and perfect, whereas the body is seen as a kind of falling away, more linked to our physical, material world.

Now, I have been describing binaries in a vertical fashion, with the first term up and the second term down. But binaries may also be viewed horizontally, with the first term at the center and the second term out at the margin. In general, Platonists think vertically — up to down — whereas Aristotelians tend to think horizontally — from center to margin. But in either case, there is a binary with a first term and a second term.

Derrida's Project

According to Derrida, all metaphysicians seek the logos, for it promises to give meaning and purpose to all things — to act as a universal center, a transcendental signified to which all signifiers can be referred back. Metaphysicians, Derrida says, are looking for an origin. They want something to ground their system in. They want either a center — that is the horizontal formulation — or a transcendental signified — that is the vertical formulation — but they want a source. A transcendental signified means something that all of our signifiers, all the things in our world, can point back to. We want an ultimate source, an ultimate origin, something fixed and

stable that we can use as a touchstone to measure everything in our world.

According to Derrida, behind this search for a center or transcendental signified is a desire for a higher reality, a full presence that is beyond, and thus not implicated in, the play of structure. In other words, we want to know that we are not alone. We want to know that there is a presence out there, something pure. We are stuck in a world of death and decay and change, and we want to know that there is some constant in the universe, some presence, something that has authority and is an origin.

According to Derrida, Western philosophy since Plato has simply renamed this presence and shifted this center without ever breaking from its centering impulse. In other words, all we do is keep coming up with new names for the logos, but it is the same thing. For Derrida, metaphysics simply means looking for a center.

Now, Derrida says that even the structuralists — the modernist thinkers of the first half of the twentieth century, including Saussure, Lévi-Strauss, Roland Barthes, and many others — even those modernists sought a center, a fixed locus or presence. Yes, Derrida says, they have broken from the old metaphysic, but they still use its terminology and its binaries. Sometimes they reverse these binaries — so instead of soul over body, intellectual over physical, conscious over unconscious, they flip it and say body over soul, physical over intellectual, unconscious over conscious. But they are still thinking in terms of binaries. They are not doing something genuinely new. They are still looking for a center. Indeed, Derrida says, the desire for a center is so strong that theorists will often posit one even if it does not exist.

Given all this, what is Derrida's project? What is his role in philosophy? Derrida would deconstruct all such attempts to posit a

center or to establish a system of binaries. We call it deconstruction because Derrida wants to literally break down or explode those binaries. He does not want to merely shift the center — he wants to throw it out. He does not want to reverse the binary — he wants to break it entirely. That is why it is called deconstruction. Derrida would break from the binary and replace it with a full, free play of meaning. He is not going to replace it with a new center — he is going to replace it with play. Everything is up in the air. Everything is arbitrary. There is no center, no presence, no origin, no transcendental signified.

Now, in keeping with his desire never to freeze meaning, Derrida litters his work with verbal puns and grammatical quibbles. Let me warn you right now: if you are thinking about picking up some Derrida, he is going to drive you crazy. He will give you a headache, because Derrida refuses to be put in a box. He refuses to let anybody pin him down. He is always playing with language, and it is of course very difficult to translate his French into English because it is all puns — he is playing, he is quibbling, because he wants to make absolutely sure that he does not posit any center or any structure in his text. He wants everything in free play. And so his language becomes playful, and again, it can literally give you a headache.

Indeed, as a master player of the game, Derrida is careful never to leave himself open to being deconstructed by another, more clever player. And deconstructionists love to deconstruct each other. Derrida is the best of them all — he is the first, but he is also the best. You cannot catch him off guard. Every time you think you have found a center, Derrida slips right out of the net. And again, it is a game — a serious game with high consequences, but a game.

The 1966 Lecture and Its Forerunners

Derrida's theories were first made public in a 1966 lecture entitled "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," delivered at Johns Hopkins University. This lecture is generally considered the birthday, at least in America, of deconstruction.

It should be noted that deconstruction is essentially equivalent to post-structuralism and postmodernism — all of those phrases are basically synonymous, because Derrida is breaking away from modernism and from structuralism. Post-modernism, post-structuralism, and deconstruction are all basically the same thing.

Now, in his lecture, Derrida ironically spends more time attacking and deconstructing modern theorists — those structuralists I mentioned a moment ago — than he does the traditional ones. Rather than going after Plato, Kant, and Hegel, he spends most of his time attacking the generation or two before him. There is a little anxiety of influence there. It is ironic, but he attacks modernism even more than traditionalism.

This has had an impact. Derrida's attack on all theory, whether traditional or modern, has led to a growing suspicion of and backlash against theory itself. I believe Derrida has shot himself in the foot. He is so playful that people are starting to become disgusted with the very idea of theory. In fact, a new school has arisen called neopragmatism, and neopragmatists like Richard Rorty have argued that there is finally no link between a critic's theoretical stance and his actual practice — in other words, that theory entails no practical consequences. For a neopragmatist, theories are just words. Our theories do not really influence our actions or our beliefs. And so, again, Derrida has rather shot himself in the foot, and people have started to turn against theory altogether.

Now, in his lecture, Derrida identifies three thinkers as his forerunners: Nietzsche, Freud, and Martin Heidegger. He deconstructs them too, but less so than he does other figures — they escape a little more cleanly. But these are his origins. Let us explain how they prepare the ground for deconstruction.

Nietzsche did away with such concepts as being and truth, showing them to be arbitrary and in constant play. In other words, Nietzsche was the one who destroyed the idea of absolute truth. He said there is no such thing as Truth with a capital T — in fact, there is no such thing as anything with a capital letter. Truth is a man-made product. And so Nietzsche broke away from this idea of truth, saying there is no origin, there is no logos. Interestingly, Nietzsche is the father of structuralism in the sense that he moves away from supernatural, absolute things, but he is also the father of post-structuralism and deconstruction, because Nietzsche said that all of our ideas are in play — they are all arbitrary. There is no one-to-one correspondence between a word and what it means. Nietzsche breaks away from all fixity and starts to put everything in play.

Freud demolished epistemology in a way analogous to how Nietzsche demolished ontology. Freud did away with the faith that the subjective self or consciousness can function as a logocentric presence or transcendental signified. Some logocentrists, as I mentioned, say that the logos is not up there but inside of me. Freud did away with that. Freud said there is no such thing as a self as a logocentric presence — we are just the products of subconscious forces. There is no pure ego, no pure cogito, no pure "I think" that can function as a logos or presence. Freud demystified that nostalgic, romantic turn inward that would seek to posit the ego as a fixed, stable center. Even our own ego, Freud says, cannot serve as a center, an origin, a touchstone, or a measure.

Martin Heidegger did away with the metaphysical concept of being as presence — of an eternal, preexistent "I Am." Heidegger does away with this faith, this illusion that there is a presence out there, some kind of essence, the "I Am That I Am" that God tells to Moses. Heidegger says no, there is no presence — we create presence. In this sense, he is much like the existentialist Jean-Paul Sartre, who argued that existence precedes essence. Traditionally, people believed there was an essence or mold from which human existence was formed. But Sartre says, like Heidegger, that no, we simply exist, we are here, and we make our own essence, we create our own presence.

So again, these three figures prepare the groundwork for Derrida's deconstruction.

The Upshot of Deconstruction: Plato and Christianity

I have explained what deconstruction is; now let us look at the upshot, or ramifications, of deconstruction. I would argue that what deconstruction does is basically attack the two foundations of Western metaphysics: Plato and Christianity, or perhaps Plato and Augustine. Derrida fundamentally deconstructs both the Platonic faith and the Christian faith. Let me show you how he does each, beginning with Plato.

Derrida, in rejecting logocentrism and its earliest proponent Plato, has ironically reaffirmed the foundational tenets of Plato's nemesis, Gorgias the Sophist. Gorgias proposed three propositions. Number one: nothing exists. Number two: if it exists, it cannot be known. Number three: if it can be known, it cannot be communicated. I want to show you how Derrida reaffirms each of those three things, and thereby explodes the Platonic faith.

First proposition: nothing exists. In place of this, Derrida argues that there exists no pure, undifferentiated presence, no norm, no center, no touchstone against which all other imitations can be measured. By "nothing exists" he means there is no logos, there is no origin.

Second proposition: if it exists, it cannot be known. For this proposition, Derrida asserts our inability to find a clear way back to any originary presence, or even any controlling system of logic. Even if there is a center, we cannot find it. We cannot get back there.

Derrida expresses this inability — this inability to return to the logos — in a word that he coined: *différance*. In French, "difference" is spelled D-I-F-F-É-R-E-N-C-E. Derrida spells his coinage with an A: D-I-F-F-É-R-A-N-C-E. This word does not exist in standard French; Derrida made it up, and I would call it a one-word poem.

Différance is an untranslatable pun that plays simultaneously on the French words for "difference" and "to defer," and also breaks down the binary of speech over writing. Let me explain that last point first. Remember that traditionally speech is privileged over writing? Well, when Derrida gives us *différance* with an A, you cannot hear the difference — *différence* with an E and *différance* with an A are pronounced exactly the same in French. The only way you can tell which word is being used is by seeing it written down. So that very word is itself a game designed to break down the idea that speech is purer than writing.

But there is something more important still. It plays on the word for "difference" and the verb "to defer." Like the structuralists, Derrida privileges difference over sameness — he believes difference is more fundamental than sameness. But Derrida does not share the structuralist faith in structure. He agrees that everything is different from everything else, but he does not believe in any underlying

structure. For Derrida, every time we think we have found a center or a structure, it merely points back to some other center or signified. Meaning, for Derrida, is perpetually deferred.

Let me explain. We have a signifier — a word — and we want to trace it back to a signified, some idea or concept. But when we find that signified, we discover that it is actually another signifier pointing somewhere else. So we follow it out to another signified, and lo and behold, that too is a signifier pointing somewhere further on. What happens ultimately is that we can never arrive at the center or meaning of any text or any philosophy. We end up trapped in what is called an aporia. Aporia is the Greek word for waylessness — we get lost. When we are caught in an aporia, we are in a state of suspension in which meaning is always already deferred. We think we are going to find it, and it escapes us.

Let me give you an example. In every major city in this country, they are perpetually working on the highway system, closing up a lane to fix it. You are driving along in traffic, saying to yourself, when is this traffic going to end? You think, when they finish fixing that lane, I will just zip right to work. But what happens as soon as they finish fixing one lane? They start on another. It is perpetually deferred. You are stuck in an aporia. There is always going to be another lane. Meaning is perpetually deferred.

Third proposition: if it can be known, it cannot be communicated. This finds its echo in Derrida's insistence that there has been a breakdown between the signifier — the word — and the signified — the meaning that word purports to point back to. Our words are arbitrary. There is no stable link between signifier and signified. We cannot arrive at one settled meaning for a poem, a text, or a philosophical tract. Even if we could know something, we could not communicate it, because our language is too slippery. Language cannot contain meaning.

So: Gorgias all over again.

The Attack on Christianity

Now let me show you quickly how deconstruction also attacks Christianity — not Christian morality, perhaps, but Christian metaphysics, specifically its centerpiece: the Incarnation and the Trinity.

Deconstruction marks the polar opposite of the Christian notion that in Jesus of Nazareth, perfect manhood and Godhood combined — or, to put it metaphysically, that God is both wholly transcendent and wholly immanent. The idea of the Incarnation says that God is transcendent, the logos, the transcendental signified, and yet at one point in history he came into our world and became a man, and the logos became known, embodied, incarnated. Derrida breaks down that faith in any such incarnation. The Christian Incarnation becomes metaphysically impossible, and indeed any incarnation becomes impossible. It is a breakdown of that entire metaphysical faith.

It is also a breakdown of the Trinity. Think about it this way. The Trinity is, in fact, the best possible answer to Gorgias' three propositions. Nothing exists? God the Father is the eternal creator and origin, the Alpha and Omega — yes, something exists. If it exists, it cannot be known? In Christ, the second person of the Trinity, God made himself known to the world. If it can be known, it cannot be communicated? The belief is that God communicates to us through the Holy Spirit, via Scripture. And so the Trinity is a direct refutation of each of Gorgias' three propositions. Deconstruction, I would argue, breaks not only with Plato, but with Christianity.

We might say, with some irony, that the reason it has taken almost 2,500 years for Gorgias' three propositions to resurface and seize the academy is that the systems of Plato and Christianity have been remarkably strong and resilient. After all, they are the foundations of

Western culture. Plato and Augustine trounced poor old Gorgias so thoroughly that it took him a couple of millennia to recover. His ideas waited 2,500 years to be resurrected in Derrida and the theory of deconstruction.

Aporia as Freedom

However, I want to end my lecture by being a little more fair to Derrida. To someone like me, who is a Platonist and a Christian, if Derrida is right, the prospect is rather grim. The idea of aporia, to me, is like being caught in Dante's dark wood of error — what is the point if Derrida is right? But for Derrida, that is not how he feels at all. Aporia is not negative to Derrida.

For Derrida, aporia is not a negative state that should call for a nostalgic longing for meaning and presence, as it does in Rousseau. Rousseau wanted to break away, but he always longed for that presence — for the Garden of Eden, for the pastoral, for the authentic. That is not what aporia means to Derrida. It is not some negative longing for a lost paradise. Rather, for Derrida, aporia is positive. It marks, as in Nietzsche, the joyous affirmation of the play of the world and of the innocence of becoming. Aporia is good, Derrida says, because it frees us from being bound by any fixed truths or origins. Deconstruction sets us free — and not only does it set us free metaphysically and philosophically, it sets us free from the guilt we might feel over the absence of meaning. Many of us feel guilty because we cannot find meaning. Derrida says: no guilt — it is freedom. Nothing exists — embrace it and rejoice.

In this affirmation of positive aporia, Derrida is much like the existentialist Jean-Paul Sartre, who felt that the absence of a higher plan or purpose in our lives did not render life meaningless, but made our choices even more vital. For Sartre, the fact that there are

no fixities, no essence, is good — it means that we are free. We do not have to fit ourselves to some preordained essence. For Derrida and for Sartre alike, we are free to make our own world, to create our own essence. And so Derrida would say of himself that deconstruction is a kind of radical freedom.

Lecture 81: Rorty's Neopragmatism

Professor Darren Stelloff

In this lecture, we are going to examine the philosophical work of Richard Rorty, one of the most important contemporary neopragmatists. In particular, we are going to look at three critical issues. First, what is Rorty's critique of the traditional practice of philosophy? That critique is contained in his work *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. Second, where Rorty thinks pragmatism offers an alternative way of formulating philosophical practice — that is contained in the wonderful collection of essays *Consequences of Pragmatism*. And then finally, we will look at how Rorty takes his own pragmatic philosophical convictions and weds them to formulating a moral and personal ethic practice, which he would characterize as a set of edifying discourses — and that is in the really readable and engaging text *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*.

Richard Rorty is certainly one of the most influential, and indeed I would argue profound, philosophers in the current high cultural scene — a figure of great renown both in this nation and in others. He has philosophically drawn on the entire pragmatic tradition, but his primary insights, I think, come from the work of Willard Van Orman Quine, as well as other philosophers like Wilfrid Sellars and Donald Davidson. What characterizes Rorty's work has been an attempt to move post-analytic American philosophy in a thoroughly pragmatic direction — hence the phrase neopragmatism.

Now, like James and Dewey before him, Rorty's pragmatism is deeply informed not only by naturalism, but also by a democratic ethos — an ethos which stresses tolerance of diversity, intellectual openness, and a sense of the need for free play in the culture. But it is also characterized, as we shall see, by a profound awareness of the contingency of these very values and of the institutions that support them.

Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature: The Critique of Epistemology

As an historicist, much of Rorty's work has taken the form of a critique of the modern philosophical tradition — and I mean philosophical with a capital P, the great Platonic tradition — a tradition centered around the problems of Truth with a capital T, the very essence of truth, and Reality with a capital R, the very essence of the real.

It is in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* that Rorty suggests that the history of modern epistemology, from Descartes to the present, ought to be seen as based on a peculiar notion: the notion that between ourselves and the world stands a medium, a medium of representation, which either adequately or inadequately mirrors the world — hence the title *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. The implication of this is that truth must therefore be described as a correspondence or copy between the representations in our medium and the world outside of us.

Historically, Rorty argues, Descartes introduced this notion and Locke simply refined it — namely, the notion that the mind and its ideas are a medium between ourselves and the world. For Descartes, our ideas are characterized by their clarity and distinction if they are true; for Locke, by their empirical, sensuous basis if they are true. But in

every case, these ideas and the mind that contains them constitute a representational scheme. By this I mean that our ideas are, as it were, images or copies of external realities that show up in the mirror — the mirror being our mind. We are, as it were, a homunculus that examines our ideas in the mind's eye.

This gives a unique task to the philosopher. The philosopher must examine the representations in the mind and distinguish the good, accurate, or true ones from the false. He must come up with criteria for demarcating what are the features of accurate representations from those that are inaccurate. As I mentioned, for Descartes, this took the form of distinguishing clear and distinct ideas from those which lack clarity and distinction. The empiricists, by contrast, argued that if you could show an idea arose from sense experience, you had grounds to believe it was an accurate representation, and if you could not reduce it to sense data, then it was probably inaccurate.

Both traditions share a fundamental problem. In positing a "veil of ideas" between ourselves and the world, they both opened the door to skepticism — precisely because it became impossible to actually prove that one's ideas corresponded to the world as it really is in and of itself. We might think of the non-skeptical philosopher as a sort of janitor of the mind who inspects our mirror and polishes it up. That polishing might be characterized as philosophical analysis, allowing us to highlight what is true and what is real.

Kant attempted to solve this problem, and particularly the problem of skepticism, with his famous Copernican Revolution and the introduction of conceptual schemes — the notion that the ideas in our mind do not reflect or mirror the world, because much of their content comes from within the hard wiring of the brain itself. But in doing so, Kant made epistemology — the study of knowledge — the critical and first philosophy. Precisely because epistemology, which examined those categories of mind, was able to mark the range of all

possible knowledge within our mind-imposed a priori conceptual schemes, it became, instead of metaphysics, the architectonic discipline or first philosophy that metaphysics had occupied in the ancient world.

Hegel then undermined this project after Kant by showing the historicity — or what I would argue is the contingency or malleability — of conceptual schemes. They are not, in fact, hardwired into our brains; they vary with cultures, they vary across time and space.

Philosophers in this century responded to that challenge — the undermining of the fixity of conceptual schemes — by moving conceptual schemes out of our minds and locating them in something they believed was more fixed: namely, language. Hence the emergence of modern philosophy of language. So Rorty argues that modern linguistic analysis is again, like Kant, an epistemological first philosophy. In many ways it has simply replicated the project Descartes introduced. Instead of the mind and its ideas serving as the mediating relation between ourselves and the world, that role has now been taken over by language and its meanings. Language and its meanings are now the medium of representation separating us from the natural world. Linguistic expressions will therefore be true — just as ideas were before — when they accurately correspond to, represent, copy, mirror, or picture reality.

Rorty claims that what underlies all of these philosophical projects, and what unites them with their Platonic forerunners, is the desire to constitute philosophy as a kind of metacultural criticism — the result of what he calls a God's-eye view. When one understands the true nature of representation, one sees things as they really are, which is the way God would see them — seeing directly through appearances. But this also means that since only the philosopher is equipped to discover the criterion of truth of representation, the philosopher becomes a sort of high cultural referee, a high cultural

mediator. The goal for the philosopher is to stand above all the other high cultural disciplines and legislate what is meaningful and what is not, what is legitimate and what is illegitimate. In that way, the modern philosopher — particularly the epistemologically centered modern philosopher — is very much like Plato's philosopher-king. He judges the moves of all the players in the culture and decides, on the basis of his epistemological criteria, which moves within the culture are acceptable and which violate the rules — rules based on pure logic and reason.

In the modern epoch, this means that the architectonic cultural role once held by religion in the medieval period — a role the Enlightenment had attempted to transfer to science — is now held, at least since the epistemological turn initiated by Kant, by philosophy. Philosophy is meant to have the kind of cultural prestige and power over the rest of culture that religion and science had once held. At least in its own self-description.

Rorty's argument is that such a development is similar to what Nietzsche called the shadow of God. God is dead, but his shadow lingers on. We have not achieved a truly secular culture, because a truly secular culture should have no architectonic discipline. There should not be one true and ultimate source of truth governing all the others. Instead, there should be free play, debate, and exchange between various disciplines, fields, and approaches.

Consequences of Pragmatism: The Pragmatic Alternative

In finding a philosophical home for such a vision, Rorty argues that the real place we must look is in the pragmatic tradition. That argument is contained in the wonderful set of essays known as *Consequences of Pragmatism*. It is there that Rorty argues that

pragmatism is really the ultimate opponent of capital-P Philosophy in both its metaphysical and its positivistic, analytical, and epistemological forms.

His argument is actually quite straightforward. Traditional philosophy has spent about 2,000 years trying to come up with a theory of truth that is not trivial. So far it has failed. We have not produced a theory of truth that philosophers will universally accept and that is not, in fact, trivial — such as "the true is what corresponds to the world" or "the true is what is correct." Rorty's pragmatic argument is that we cannot prove, after 2,000 years of failure, that we will never succeed. But at some point, you have to give up trying. The point is not to come up with a better solution to the question of truth. The point is to change the conversation. Much as Newton's physics had shifted the discussion between primary and secondary forces in explaining nature — at some point we did not actually solve the question of the relationship between them, we simply stopped talking about primary causes and talked only about secondary causes.

For Rorty, truth is a property of sentences — such as "2 plus 2 equals 4," "cruelty is bad," or "Galileo preceded Newton." These are all sentences that have the property of being true. And his claim is that there is no interesting theory about what such sentences have in common, besides the fact that we believe them — any more than there is an interesting theory about the goodness shared by the various acts we approve of. What is common to the goodness of a fine meal and the goodness of a moral action is nothing except the fact that we approve of them.

So, like James, Rorty ultimately thinks that truth is a primitive term, a sort of compliment we pay to sentences that are currently working for us. As James put it, truth is what is good in the way of belief. The difference between Rorty and James is that Rorty thinks James was mistaken in calling this a theory of truth. We should not try to offer a

theory of truth, nor try to prove that a theory of truth is impossible. Rather, we should simply change the subject of high cultural conversation and see what we can find that is more tractable and more enlightening.

Correspondence theories of truth assume that language is, again, a fixed medium of representation that can be compared to a fixed and final reality — that the connection between the world and language is always one of mirroring and representation. But Rorty and all pragmatists believe that language is in fact part of the world. It does not mirror the world; it is in the world, part of nature itself. So the connections between our linguistic usages, our speech acts, and other phenomena are not representational, but causal. We speak to get work done. Our language is one of the tools we use to master our environment.

Thus, Rorty would claim that Einstein's physics is preferable to Newton's not because it more accurately represents or corresponds to the world, but because it better helps us to cope with nature. It allows us to make more accurate predictions, exercise more powerful control over physical processes, and explain anomalies that Newtonian mechanics could not. That same instrumental or pragmatic orientation toward truth in culture applies not only to the sciences, but to the arts and humanities as well.

Rorty's point is that beliefs should not be seen as metaphysical entities that need analysis and that mirror the world. Rather, beliefs are — as James had held — habits of action, expressions of our dispositions. To believe that coffee is desirable in the morning is to express a disposition that, all things being equal, one will have coffee at breakfast.

Against the entire realistic vision of representation in language, Rorty argues for anti-realism — the notion that a final and fixed world, to

be compared to our conceptual schemes, has absolutely no explanatory power, because we never come in contact with such a world. The world that we experience is always a world already under some conceptual scheme. The notion of a fixed and final world to be compared to our conceptual schemes is, as he puts it, a world well lost.

Rorty then wants to argue that pragmatic philosophy offers a different trajectory, a different way of practicing the discipline. Rather than trying to offer epistemological foundations for our beliefs, little-p philosophy — pragmatic philosophy — should instead try to show how our various descriptions of things, our actions, and our institutions hang together. What unifies them? How do they coalesce, in the broadest sense of that term? Not in terms of a philosophical or scientific reduction like Marx offered, but in terms of a descriptive scheme.

Whereas capital-P Philosophy conceives of high cultural inquiry as converging on the truth, little-p philosophy prefers to see such discourse as conversation. And there is a profound difference in that orientation. If you see high cultural inquiry as converging on the truth, it really is based on the old medieval notion of university debate — high cultural discourse as essentially a debate in which one side ultimately wins. But if you adopt that sense of conversation, then you do not expect to reach final solutions. The conversation is its own end. We carry on philosophical discourse for its own sake.

Such a post-foundational, little-p philosophy would eschew systematic theory. In its place, it would offer edifying discourses — discourses which enlighten, inform, and build us up. Examples of these, for Rorty at least, include Hegelian historicism, which allows us to understand the different ways in which different epochs understood themselves; Nietzschean self-creation, which helps us understand how we might create ourselves in an aesthetic and

authentic way; and Heideggerian talk of the historically contingent nature of language itself. Each of these is an edifying discourse that, rather than being systematic, is genuinely enlightening.

Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity: Ethics and Democratic Life

It is really in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* that Rorty tries to show how his own edifying pragmatic discourses hang together with the contemporary democratic projects of the West — something Rorty calls postmodern bourgeois liberalism.

It is important to keep a couple of things in mind here. Like most pragmatists, Rorty is very much a democratic humanist, and he is deeply concerned to see philosophy not as justifying democracy, but as its handmaid — the handmaid of an open society, an open culture, open conversation, and open social institutions. So do not be surprised that Rorty does not try to ground democracy philosophically. Unlike John Rawls, he does not try to give democracy or social democracy philosophical foundations, precisely because he does not think they need such foundations. Such institutions are always justified pragmatically. We embrace democracy because, having lived in it, we cannot imagine living anywhere else. We embrace openness because, having seen what closed societies look like, we cannot imagine wanting to live anywhere else. What Rorty does instead is try to offer a view which he thinks coheres with our democratic practices and therefore offers support for them. It is a handmaid to democracy, but it does not actually justify democracy — because that would mean placing philosophy before democracy. And this is a critical point for Rorty. If we have to choose between the philosophical tradition and living in a democratic and open society,

he has no doubt: we take the democratic and open society. That always has priority over speculation.

Contingency

Rorty argues that post-Hegelian inquiry has shown us the contingency of our language, our beliefs, and our institutions — and that is, of course, the first word in the title. What Hegel showed us was that there is no necessity to our beliefs except the development of history itself, that our institutions might have been otherwise if things had worked out otherwise, and that they may indeed change dramatically in the future. This has allowed us to see how we might re-describe ourselves and our institutions in different ways, based on differing historical and cultural perspectives. It has also shown us that there is no capital-R reality, truth, or goodness to which we must subject ourselves — that truth, reality, and goodness are themselves historical projects that have emerged over time, and that we are, in a very real humanistic sense, at the center of these concepts. We create them in time and space.

Such re-description, Rorty argues, is best accomplished through what he calls non-normal discourses — an obvious allusion to the work of Thomas Kuhn. As you will recall, Kuhn argued that there are two sorts of science: normal science, which is the lab work and traditional filling out of established research projects, and revolutionary science, which fundamentally transforms paradigms and creates new ways of thinking and interpreting the world. It is precisely such revolutionary discourses that Rorty believes allow the kind of re-descriptions of our realities, institutions, practices, and beliefs that he draws from the Hegelian tradition.

He believes that such non-normal discourse is best exemplified not in rational theories, but in metaphors and images — and that it is best achieved not by theorists, but by strong poets and utopians. Scientific innovators who transform paradigms are, as it were, strong

poets; and utopian visionaries, those who can imagine a world completely antithetical to the one they inhabit, are also strong poets. The vision of strong poetry here actually comes from the literary critic Harold Bloom, and this is, again, part of the eclecticism and sense of "hanging together" that Rorty wants to demonstrate as he draws his vocabulary from philosophy of science, literary criticism, traditional philosophy, anthropology, and so on.

So in Rorty's utopian postmodern bourgeois liberal society, its hero is that strong poet — the person who can liberate himself or herself from inherited cultural traditions and has the vision to imagine a new way of describing the world.

Irony

Ironists are people who realize the contingency of what Rorty calls final vocabularies. What are final vocabularies? Rorty describes it this way: on your deathbed, you may try to utter a few words that characterize your sense of who you are, of what your identity is. Those words might refer to your religious tradition, your nation, your family, your culture, your deepest beliefs, your deepest pleasures. Those are your final vocabularies, because those are the terms with which you would describe yourself as an individual. We might, in fact, compare this to MacIntyre's idea of a horizon we need in order to give meaning to our lives — that horizon would constitute a kind of final vocabulary.

Ironists understand two things about these final vocabularies. One, that they are contingent — that final vocabularies depend largely on the culture one comes from, the family one was born into, the circumstances that history has placed one in. And two, they have doubts about their final vocabularies. They are not sure that these vocabularies really express who they are and who they want to be. They realize that their present understandings and vocabularies cannot resolve these doubts, cannot fully underwrite them. And they

do not think that their vocabulary corresponds to reality or taps into any extra-human or metaphysical power.

Ultimately, ironists are characterized by one burning fear: that their final vocabularies might not truly be their own — that they might in fact have been imposed on them by their culture, their nation, and their society. In other words, their greatest fear is that they are inauthentic, cookie-cutter reproductions of their cultures. That is why they must be ironic, constantly endeavoring toward self-creation. Such irony is typical of the democratic intellectual, and the purpose of such irony is to facilitate private and individual self-creation — the deployment of one's own unique final vocabularies, ones of which we will never be entirely certain or satisfied, but which nonetheless represent a quest for personal authenticity, a quest for personal individuality.

Solidarity

Liberals, for Rorty, are people who think cruelty is the worst thing we can do. Like Hume and other pragmatists — and on this question Hume is, I would argue, a genuine precursor to pragmatism — Rorty believes that moral education is never achieved through the reading of philosophy. It is never achieved through rational speculation. Quite the contrary: moral education is achieved through sensitizing us to the suffering of others, because then our liberal instincts allow us to see those others as potentially ourselves. And again, as in the case of Hume, we achieve this sensitizing not through philosophy, but through literature. It is by reading about the suffering of others, written by those others, that we come to understand that they are not really so different from us. And once that happens, we have found the first basis for undermining our cruelty toward them. Included in this cruelty, of course, is not only physical torture and deprivation, but humiliation as well. It is precisely our literary sensitivity to the humiliation and suffering of others that allows us to

re-describe those others as us. One might think of the writings of Toni Morrison, for example, in humanizing for white Americans the plight of African Americans in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

What holds this postmodern bourgeois liberal society together is not shared philosophical beliefs, religious credos, or analytical hypotheses, but instead a sense of solidarity — a sense of oneness, a sense that we constitute a "we." This is a critical notion, because Rorty believes, following other philosophers, that ethical terms are in fact we-intentions. That is to say, if we want to analyze what we mean by a sentence such as "it is wrong to torture prisoners," what that ultimately means is: torturing prisoners is not the sort of thing we do. And this is an important point for Rorty, because he argues you cannot prove why torture is wrong. But you can still decry torture simply by stating that it is not the sort of thing we do.

So all of our moral and ethical judgments, for Rorty, are we-intentions. And our "we" is the we of the United States and Western Europe — that is our ethnos. Rorty is quite clear and explicit in saying we cannot get beyond ethnocentricity. Westerners will by nature be ethnocentric, as all other peoples are. But progress consists in learning to describe others as part of "we" — in including them within our ethnos. So, for example, Rorty argues in this text that it is a mistake to describe the suffering of people in inner cities as suffering accruing to African Americans — that describes them as "they." Far more effective to say: these people are Americans, and no American should be forced to live under such circumstances. Include them within the "we."

Rorty also argues that we need not ultimately fear our Western ethnocentricity, precisely because it is distinguished by its own unique self-correcting fear of ethnocentricity. The Western ethnos has learned the danger of being narrow and closed-minded, and so

it corrects itself by constantly auto-critiquing — critiquing its own ethnocentricity. It is this very fear of its own ethnocentricity, and its quest for openness toward different cultures and ethnicities, that makes the Western ethnos so rich, inclusive, and capable of moral progress.

Hanging It All Together

How, then, do we reconcile our goals of irony and solidarity with our understanding of contingency? We do it not on the basis of a philosophical synthesis, but on a case-by-case basis. Our public goals of solidarity and the fight against cruelty maintain a natural centrality in matters having to do with the public realm, but they need not impinge upon or undermine our projects of private self-creation and personal fulfillment.

In this way, I want to conclude by saying that Rorty is really trying to offer us the best of both continental traditions — exemplified on the one side by postmodernists and post-structuralists like Foucault, and on the other by critical theorists like Habermas. He wants that solidarity which is the very essence of Habermasian ethical philosophy, and the irony which is essential to the post-structuralist project of self-creation. Combining them together within pragmatism gives us what Rorty believes is the best of all worlds.

Lecture 82: Gouldner, Ideology and the New Class

Professor Darren Staloff

The late Alvin Gouldner was a renegade sociologist who described himself as a ridge-rider between two sorts of intellectual practices — on the one hand, sociology, and on the other, the sort of critical Marxist social theory that we would find in the Frankfurt School and in such contemporary Marxists as Jürgen Habermas.

In his early work, Gouldner was often concerned to use critical Marxism as a means to uncover the ideological biases and one-sided distortions that, at least in his mind, characterize the practice of academic sociology and social science and theory in general. But it was in his later career that he offered what I would call a turnabout, by offering a Marxist critique of Marxism itself.

This was contained in a fairly remarkable trilogy of books written in the late 1970s called *The Dark Side of the Dialectic*. They were *The Dialectic of Ideology and Technology*, *The Future of Intellectuals and the Rise of the New Class*, and *The Two Marxisms*. By applying the techniques of Marxist ideology critique to Marxist ideology itself, Gouldner practiced a sort of Socratic form of inquiry and criticism, where he raised critical issues which he characterized as a sort of outlaw Marxism. I want briefly to quote from him on the practice of outlaw Marxism:

The Marxist outlaw's insistence on the absoluteness and inescapability of contradiction, his insistence on a critique grounded in such a universalism, means that the Marxist outlaw is a Socratic — our Marxist Socratic — in the sense that the Marxist Socratic critiques Marxist establishments and stands outside of them.

And this obviously represents a dangerous position. As Gouldner states, "being the critic of all positive doctrines, searching out their limits, the Socratic is necessarily suspect in the eyes of all who offer and all who ache for a positive doctrine." In the end, then, "the establishment and those who aspire to succeed it — in other words, both the old and the young — will accuse him of poisoning the mind of the youth. Thus Socratics are, and are made, outlaws. Clearly, however, Marxist outlaws have not surrendered the dialectic, but continue to probe and wander its dark side. Only those who can move without joining packaged tours of the world can afford such a journey."

I would argue that in deploying Marxist ideology critique against Marxism itself, Gouldner revolutionized the way we think about society, politics, and even world history.

Overview

In this lecture, we are going to look at the three central issues raised in each of these texts. First, the analysis of ideology and ideology critique contained in the first volume, *The Dialectic of Ideology and Technology*. Then, the defects in the Marxist scenario for modern class struggles contained in the rather slim volume *The Future of Intellectuals and the Rise of the New Class*. And finally, his archaeology — his interpretation — of the development of Marx's oeuvre in *The Two Marxisms*.

The Dialectic of Ideology and Technology: The Emergence and Rationality of Ideology

Let us begin with the historical analysis of the emergence of ideology. Gouldner notes that ideologies emerge in the modern

period — the term was, I believe, first coined in the Napoleonic era — as a response to the breakdown of what we might call the discursive credit of traditional authorities. We might think, for example, of aristocrats and clerics in the Ancien Régime, whose speech was credited by social inferiors simply on the basis of their position within a traditional hierarchy. We have seen this form of authority analyzed by Weber. All of this source of discursive credit, for both aristocrats and traditional authorities and clerics, was destroyed by the American and particularly the French Revolution.

A new ground for political discourse was found in what Gouldner calls the modern culture of rational discourse, which is characterized by three distinct features. The first is that all assertions in the culture of rational discourse must be justified without reference to authority — either the authority of one's status in the social hierarchy, or by appealing to other authorities, a technique we had seen in scholastic philosophy, where one validated one's philosophical position by showing that it fit with the scriptures or with the writings of Aristotle. The second feature is that assent to positions and arguments must be purely voluntary. One does not convince someone of the truth of an ideological or political position at the end of a bayonet. Finally, it demands that all assumptions in this mode of speech must be made explicit, as must all inferences. One cannot say that a liberal social democracy produces the best society and that one has many arguments to validate this but simply does not have time to present them. It is, as it were, a sort of game of show and tell. One shows one's premises and tells the inferences that are drawn from those premises to one's ideological and political conclusions. In this sense, ideology is like social science, and for that matter Marxism, because they all speak in this idiom of modern rationality. Gouldner argued that it was in fact relatively rational, and therefore an advance over traditional forms of political discourse and action, which had been

based again on appeals to tradition or naked advances of self-interest.

Ideologies were able to respond to this crisis of credit created by the French and American Revolutions because of a communications revolution — particularly a communications revolution in print media — that had occurred in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. One feature of this was the emergence of cheap rag paper, which fundamentally lowered the cost of both production and consumption of print media: journals, newspapers, magazines. The second was the fact that at that moment, the print media were controlled by relatively small, privately owned, and decentralized units of production. It was not particularly expensive to open a printing press and start a journal, and this resulted in a dramatic explosion in the number of newspapers and journals in the period — quite a dramatic explosion, both in Europe and in the United States.

Gouldner notes that these media — these newspapers and journals, which it is important to remember were always intensely partisan, ideological, and politically oriented — supplied a venue for the diffusion of ideologies that both reported the nature of the world and contained commands as to what we should do next. And it was these ideologies, contained in these media, that served as intermediaries between, on the one hand, literate publics who read them, and on the other, the realm of politics.

We could then say that the rationality and origin of ideology are tied up with these print media, and in particular with what is presupposed by them: the act of writing. This is important because writing is a very decontextualized mode of discourse or speech. When you speak to someone you know, they do not really need you to make all of your assumptions explicit — you know the context in which they are speaking, their gestures may carry a lot of information, and their social status may carry a lot of information about what their agendas

are. But on the written page, one has none of that context, none of that background information. So everything must be laid out in the text itself. And it is for this very reason that printed writing is the ideal medium for that culture of rational discourse which characterizes the modern epoch.

Ideologies function, according to Gouldner, to unmask each other — that is, they expose the hidden, occluded interests that lay behind them. We might think here of Marx as an ideological critic of British political economy, showing that British political economists actually assume the very thing which is at issue: the rectitude of private property. Marxism does this by recontextualizing classical political economy as an ideology, and thus uncovering its biases and class interests.

So the rationality of each ideology is limited, because each ideologue claims to be — unlike all of his competitors — completely and entirely disinterested. Each ideology and each ideologue claims to be the only one to speak purely on the basis of a will to truth. Ideologies thus deny their basic weakness, their basic flaw: that they are in fact determined by the interests both of their formulators and of their adherents.

I do not want to suggest that Gouldner believes this is a unique flaw in ideology alone. He thinks it is also shared by social science, which, despite its claim to be value-free, has the same occlusion of its own interests. But it is particularly damaging in ideology, because all ideologies presuppose a unity of theory and practice. And given that unity of theory and practice, the tendency to see oneself as disinterested gives rise to what we have noted in the history of ideological politics: the phenomena of fanaticism and self-righteousness.

Now, since ideology is a variant of this culture of rational discourse — with its fixation on public objectivity and the grammar of rule-bound inference — it is profoundly tied up with those persons who are most immersed in that culture. Ideologies do not appeal broadly and universally to all members of society. Those who are more deeply immersed in that culture of rational discourse, i.e., those who are more educated and more trained, are more attracted to it. Thus we find that ideology tends to have a strong appeal to cultural workers. Artists, humanists, painters, and writers tend to have much stronger ideological convictions than common laypeople. And most pointedly, it is on university campuses that one finds the strongest ideological convictions.

Such ideological critique, for Gouldner, raises the possibility — which we will explore a bit later — of an ideological unmasking of Marxism itself. We will see that this raises the question of how a social science which purports to be the ideology of the proletariat was in fact first revealed and subsequently sustained by trained academicians and others immersed in this culture of rational discourse.

The Future of Intellectuals and the Rise of the New Class: Defects in the Marxist Scenario

I want now to turn to the second volume, dealing with the future of intellectuals and the rise of the new class, which chronicles what Gouldner believes were the fundamental flaws and defects in the traditional Marxist scenario of class struggle. To put it quite briefly, Gouldner believed that the traditional scenario Marx had deployed for class struggle was fundamentally wrong. Marx believed that social revolutions would occur in the most advanced industrialized societies, between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. But in fact, the major social revolutions did not occur in that context. They

occurred in more backward countries, and they rarely involved the proletariat — they generally involved the peasantry. Moreover, the peasantry was not mobilized by a radicalized proletariat, but rather by vanguard parties organized in a Leninist fashion, which were comprised not of workers but of Marxist intellectuals who had come to define themselves as professional revolutionaries. This is critical because such Marxist intellectuals and professional revolutionaries play no role in traditional Marxist theory.

This leads Gouldner to conclude that the real class struggle of the modern epoch is not between bourgeoisie and proletariat, but between what he calls the old class — the moneyed bourgeoisie — and the new class, which is made up of two strata. The larger stratum is what he calls the technical intelligentsia, a group whose growth and economic and institutional importance in the last century has been simply phenomenal. By this we mean doctors, lawyers, and engineers, as well as people trained for bureaucracy. We should also include people with MBAs and CEOs who do not own stock in their companies. These are essentially new class people. We often refer to them as professionals. The other stratum is the older stratum of traditional humanistic intellectuals: philosophers, literary critics, historians, and so forth.

Such a pattern of class struggle between this new class and the old class actually fits better, in a certain sense, with the traditional theory of class struggle, which is in fact always between elites. Now, this is a bit confusing, because Marx had pulled a kind of sleight of hand in the Manifesto. He says history is the story of class struggle — master against slave, lord against serf, bourgeoisie against proletarian. But that framing only appears in the Manifesto. When Marx actually looks at historical class struggles, they are always between an old elite and a new elite. The real class struggle of Rome was between the patricians and the newly emerging class of equestrians or

knights. The real medieval class struggle was between the old class — the feudal aristocracy — and the newly emerging bourgeoisie of the cities. So the modern class struggle would again be between two elites.

Such an interpretation would claim that Marxist revolutionaries mobilize workers or peasants through ideologies which occlude the interests of those intellectuals as members of a sort of cultural bourgeoisie — experts endowed with a kind of human capital acquired through higher education. It is precisely this that Gouldner argues explains why Marxism was never able to account for itself. Because, at least in part, Marxism is an ideology of a revolutionary and radicalized intelligentsia that is using the working class or the peasantry to overthrow its bourgeois rival and seize control of state and economic power.

This again has the virtue of describing the actual state of existing socialist regimes, where it is quite rare to find proletarians or working-class people in positions of authority. If you recall the old Soviet Union, most members of the Politburo were quite well educated. If one joined the party without higher education and tried to move up the hierarchy, one was usually sent to a university first. They all held positions either as doctors or as engineers.

Now, obviously in the West, the class struggle between the old class and the new class has not been revolutionary. But it is apparent, particularly if we look at corporations, where there is a clear struggle between shareholders and CEOs — a struggle that emerged in the 1980s with the phenomenon of corporate raiding. Figures like T. Boone Pickens and other corporate raiders and takeover artists basically appealed to stockholders by saying: your CEOs are a professional salaried bureaucracy who do not represent your interests in maximizing profits. Therefore, takeovers will allow us to remove some of their power — they have come to control

corporations — and allow us to pursue a maximization of profits. Certainly this was an argument that John Kenneth Galbraith had used in his analysis of capitalism, arguing that in modern corporations the bourgeoisie may own but does not control the means of production — it is actually controlled by a professionally trained intelligentsia.

We can also find this dynamic in politics. Gouldner argued that the Republican Party is really the representative of the old class, the moneyed bourgeoisie, the National Association of Manufacturers. But the Democratic Party is not, in his view, primarily the agent of the working class. Rather, it appeals largely to the new class of general and humanistic intellectuals, who are overwhelmingly Democratic. Here he follows the research of Seymour Martin Lipset, who had shown that the higher you ascend in the academic hierarchy, the farther to the left your convictions move. If you reach the very apex, the top positions at institutions like Harvard, you are likely to find yourself among anarcho-syndicalists or communists, whereas most academics are simply left liberals.

The new class's control of technical information — information which is essential to business and industry — revolutionizes the means of production and gives it an advantageous bargaining position with the old class relative to, say, the proletariat or lumpenproletariat. This is reflected in the fact that, despite occasional overproduction of professionals, they still tend to generate far better benefits and higher incomes than traditional skilled labor, or obviously unskilled labor.

Now, part of what constitutes this class, according to Gouldner, is its human or cultural capital — the fact that it believes it can generate income, or has a right to derive income, from its higher education. But it is also unified by its shared culture of critical discourse, that mode of modern rationality. And it is this culture of critical discourse that makes intellectuals and intelligentsia feel that they are in some

sense epistemically superior to all other classes, and that they have a superior social rectitude insofar as this culture is predicated on voluntary assent and forbids reference to authority or the social position of the speaker. They thus feel they are, in a sense, the most reasonable group in society. We might think of this culture of critical discourse as a sort of modern logos which speaks in the ear of humanistic intellectuals and intelligentsia, and gives them the right to conceive of themselves as a sort of modern-day Platonic philosopher-kings. As Gouldner says, it is this culture of critical discourse that gives them a Platonic complex.

I want to conclude this section by noting that Gouldner sees this class as flawed — and it certainly is. It is jealous of its prerogatives. It has an inordinate sense of its own self-worth and an inordinate will to power. But nonetheless, it is committed to the public rationality exposed and essentially contained within that notion of a culture of critical discourse. It is also characterized by at least a minimal commitment to a notion of social justice, and by an almost constant critique of authority and various forms of exploitation, racism, and patriarchy. Thus, while flawed, it might still be a true universal class. Again, in Gouldner's phrase, it might still be the best card history has left to play.

The Two Marxisms: An Archaeology of Marx's Oeuvre

I want now to turn to the third text, which deals with an archaeology of Marxism and confronts the problem of traditional Marxology in order to produce something Gouldner calls nightmare Marxism.

Traditional Marxology — the traditional study of Marxism — distinguishes between two different sorts of Marxisms. The first is critical Marxism, found in Marx's early Hegelian or Romantic writings, which deals with the problem of alienation. It is also found in

twentieth-century voluntaristic Marxists like Lenin, Gramsci, and Georg Lukács, as well as the Frankfurt School and, obviously, Jürgen Habermas. The other tradition is known as scientific Marxism, found in Marx's later writings — most notably *Das Kapital* — and in the writings of economistic Marxists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as well as later twentieth-century structural Marxists like Louis Althusser and the positivistic techno-determinism of G. A. Cohen. Each of these Marxisms claims that it is the true and essential Marxism, and that the other is a distortion of the true teaching.

Gouldner argues that this dispute exists precisely because there is a real disparity in Marx's work. The two Marxisms reflect the different interests Marx himself had, as well as the different interpretations of his work from either a humanistic intellectual position — hence critical Marxism — or from a technical point of view — hence scientific Marxism.

Gouldner wants to replace this dualism with a tripartite theory in which he treats Marxism itself as an example of a more general phenomenon: that of theory construction. Gouldner was profoundly influenced by the work of Thomas Kuhn. According to this paradigm, Marxism, like all theories, is a sort of intellectual property that theorists lay claim to.

In the first phase of theory construction, Marx drew together the basic elements and structures of his theory of historical materialism — based on the problem of scarcity and the primacy of the productive forces, as well as the ubiquity of class struggle. This period culminates for Marx around 1848 with the *Communist Manifesto*. Having laid out the basic structure of the theory, at this moment Marx and Engels are at their most critical. Critical, first, because they are most likely to criticize other authors and theories and claim to have transcended mere philosophy and mere ideology.

And critical as well because they want to confront the contradictions within other theories. One might think of this as follows: once having constructed their basic views from elements drawn from a wide variety of sources and surrounding socialisms, Marx and Engels are immediately concerned to demarcate their socialism as scientific rather than utopian, and uniquely theirs. They are, in a sense, demanding an intellectual copyright for their doctrine.

In the second phase, Marx and Engels take their paradigm — their primary theory — and begin to apply it to various test cases. We find this in the *Grundrisse*, *The Civil War in France*, and *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon*, as well as various musings on what they call the Asiatic mode of production. This phase really comes to a close with the onset of *Das Kapital*. What happens in this period is that Marx begins to find there are a great many anomalies in his theory as he applies it to concrete cases. Take the class struggles in France. They begin to take on a chaotic element. Initially, Marx had held that the class struggles in France are between bourgeoisie and proletariat. But the more he examines them, the more he says: well, it may not be between bourgeoisie and proletariat — it may be between bourgeoisie and peasantry, the classic struggle of town against country. Yet even that seems less than completely adequate to him. At one point he argues that perhaps the struggle is really between the bourgeoisie and the lumpenproletariat, the dangerous class, and that in this way it is a sort of proto-fascism. And then finally he says: perhaps there is actually another independent agency in the struggle — the state itself. This is obviously heretical in traditional Marxist theory, because we know that the state is really a superstructural agency of the ruling class, not a separate agency.

Similarly with the Asiatic mode of production. The basic problem here is that in classical China and India, it is not clear that aristocrats and lords, or even peasants for that matter, actually own the land.

They do not hold a fief in that land, as Weber showed us. They have the right to derive income from that land — as do peasants — but that is based on their service to the state. Land ownership seems to belong to the state, and therefore once again the state emerges as a relatively autonomous institution, in contrast to traditional Marxist theory. Moreover, the Asiatic mode of production undermines the proprietary nature of classes. Classes cannot be based exclusively on relations to the means of production and ownership, because no one seems to really own land here. And this, of course, raises a problem for Western societies as well, where we might also find classes that are not proprietary.

Having found these anomalies, in the third phase Marx and Engels essentially turn their back on them. This is the period of theory consolidation that we find in *Das Kapital*. Rather than change the paradigm to fit the anomalies, they defend the primary paradigm against vulgarizations, try to dismiss the anomalies as less than critical, and formalize the theory by looking at a paradigm case that will work — that of England.

For Gouldner, it is this second period — that of paradigm application, the transitional phase between the first and third Marxisms — that is in fact the most interesting and fruitful. It is interesting and fruitful because the anomalies it generates, which Marx and Marxism subsequently ignore, are critical to understanding something he calls nightmare Marxism.

Let us look at these anomalies again. The first was that the state might not always be a superstructural agency — it might in fact be a separate power and agency in its own right. This is threatening because if that is true, then Marxism had always implied that the state would wither away under communism precisely because it was a superstructural agency of a ruling class, and once classes were gone, the state would disappear. But if the state is in fact an

independent agency, then the dramatic centralization of state power under the dictatorship of the proletariat and subsequent socialism might in fact lead to a kind of disastrous totalitarianism.

The second anomaly was, as you will recall, that not all classes might be proprietary — which means that Marxism might not cover all social classes in Western Europe, and might not even work particularly well in explaining Eastern Europe, where most feudalism was prebendal.

These anomalies together, as I have suggested, constitute the basis of nightmare Marxism — the sort of hidden and subterranean fears that ultimately led Marx and Engels to stop pursuing them. The first and more superficial fear is that Marxism might not be a scientific socialism at all, but rather, in light of its many anomalies, just another utopian socialism. This is the view that Cardinal Newman had proposed when he said Marxism was really just the last Christian heresy — the last social doctrine where the meek will truly inherit the earth.

But the deeper fear is that Marxism, as a theory of proprietary classes, has failed to see that it was Europe's unique experience with private property that led to its Promethean dynamism, its constant revolutionizing of the means of production. In this nightmare, proprietary classes turn out to be a necessary condition for technological and industrial development — a condition unique to contemporary European capitalism. And the abolition of private property, therefore, does not really eliminate scarcity so much as usher in an industrial version of the static Asiatic mode of production: a sort of new oriental despotism. In short, the nightmare is that the bourgeoisie were right after all — that private property is the key to the advance of civilization.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the *Dark Side of the Dialectic* is obviously a vast project and resource. Gouldner's commitment to Marxism, even of the outlaw variety, is a matter of his own moral consciousness. But his discussion of the role of intellectuals and intelligentsia is a fundamental transformation in social theory. And his analysis of the origins and rationality of ideology and theory construction sheds light on important problems not only in the sociology of knowledge, but also in political and cultural history, as well as the history of philosophy itself — including the question of why philosophers have had such a Platonic complex.

I would urge that the historical implications of Gouldner's findings may prove far more profound than even he suggested. While professional engineers and technicians are indeed a new class, a new social stratum, humanistic intellectuals are as old as human history itself. So too are non-technical intelligentsia like lawyers, scribes, priests, and Mandarin officials. Far from being a new class, they might well — along with the peasantry — be the oldest class in history. And their Platonic complex might be the Western form of their yearning for their traditional position: that of the rulers of a hieratic city-state or oriental despotism.

Lecture 83: MacIntyre, The Rationality of Traditions

Professor Philip Carey

Alasdair MacIntyre is a contemporary philosopher who represents an unusual but really very important position on the contemporary philosophical scene, which we could call the concern for the rationality of traditions. He is a Scottish philosopher but has been teaching in the United States for about the past twenty years. The consistent thread in his thinking, from the beginning of his work to the present, has been a critique of liberal modernity. He has always been a critic of liberalism — first as a Marxist in the 1960s, and now as a Thomistic Catholic. In both guises, he has been a critic of liberal modernity.

I am going to call him a right-wing postmodernist, and I want to explain a little bit later what I think that means. The basic notion is that he thinks tradition is the necessary context for rationality, and I will explain that in some detail as we go.

The Incoherence of Modern Moral Reasoning: *After Virtue*

The negative side of this thesis — the critical side — is that MacIntyre thinks that moral reasoning in modernity has become incoherent. MacIntyre started out as a historian of ethics, someone whose focus is on the history of moral reasoning from Aristotle to the present. When he surveys the whole history of how we reason about morality and ethics, he looks at modernity in the liberal era as an era of incoherence, an era in which we cannot come to any kind of reasoned agreement about the good. He proposes that we should look to Aristotle and the Christian traditions — especially the

Thomistic tradition of Catholicism — to revive a coherent tradition of moral reasoning.

Now, you can see the right-wing side of this. What makes it postmodern? It is a critique of modernity in the following sense: modernity itself is a critique of traditions. Modernity is a view that sees tradition as irrational and a hindrance to reason. Think about the central episode in modernity for MacIntyre, the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century. It was defined by one of the great Enlightenment figures, Immanuel Kant, as a kind of coming of age. Enlightenment means that human beings no longer live under the tutelage or pedagogy of traditional authorities like the Church. We leave our minority behind. We become grown-ups, intellectually speaking. We think for ourselves. We do not believe things because the authorities tell us, just because they are authorities.

There is this flight from authority — Jeffrey Stout calls it that — an attempt, really an individualistic attempt, to think things out for yourself, represented most symbolically, I suppose, by Descartes, who closes all those books which had deceived him so much or left him so uncertain, and tries to figure it all out by himself by retreating to his own mind. That individualism, that rejection of tradition and of intellectual authorities in order to figure things out for yourself, is in many ways the essence of Enlightenment as Kant defines it.

Another way of putting it comes from Hans-Georg Gadamer: modernity can be defined as the prejudice against prejudice — where prejudice means not bigotry, but rather prejudgment or preconception. Modernity is a prejudice against any form of thought which is based on prior culture, education, or tradition, as if you could start anew without any preconceived notions and just figure it all out for yourself. That is modernity. It is as if in modernity we are all Adam or Eve, starting from scratch, untrammeled by culture,

education, tradition, all those books that Descartes found such a hindrance to clear thought.

So modernity is opposed to tradition and thinks of it as the enemy of rationality. Perhaps the great spirit of modernity is represented by Tevye in *Fiddler on the Roof*. Remember, Tevye at the beginning of the play points to the fiddler on the roof who is fiddling away, and he sings the song of tradition, tradition, tradition, and he says: why do we have a fiddler on the roof? It is tradition. That is, it cannot be explained. There is no rational reason for it. It is just the way we do things. It makes no real sense. It is not rational, but it is tradition, so we do it. Tradition presents itself as the opposite of rationality — the sort of stuff that does not really make sense, but we just do it because we have always done it that way. That is Tevye, and in many ways that is modernity. Although Tevye himself is portrayed as a rather traditionalist character, the author of *Fiddler on the Roof* was not a traditionalist but a modernist.

MacIntyre's point is that tradition is not necessarily irrational, and indeed that tradition is necessary for rationality. You cannot have a neutral modern rationality apart from tradition. Tradition is the necessary context for rationality. It is a bit like saying that language is the necessary context for thought. If you cannot think without language, then you cannot think without having learned a language from your parents or from your culture. If you cannot reason without a tradition, then you are never going to be able to start from scratch, as if you were Adam, Eve, or Descartes.

One way to arrive at this point of view is to recognize that modernity itself is a tradition. Here, then, is this anti-traditionalist tradition. And modernity cannot really survive the recognition that it is itself a tradition. Because if you are hostile to tradition — if the very essence of modernity is hostility to tradition — and modernity then recognizes, oh, modernity is itself a tradition, it must say: either

tradition is a context for rationality, or modernity itself is a mistake. And the latter is MacIntyre's view. Modernity continues to survive in a fragmented form, but modernity cannot recognize its own nature. In order to be a modern thinker, you must hide from yourself the fact that modernity is a tradition, because as soon as you see that modernity is a tradition, you have to say: well then it is irrational, and therefore we cannot be modern. And at that point, you become postmodern. One way of saying what postmodernity is all about is to say that postmodernity is what happens when modernity recognizes that it is a tradition and thus dissolves itself.

And that means modernity dissolves into a kind of incoherence, because modernity has fought successfully against all these other traditions — religious traditions like Catholicism and Judaism. It has made almost all of these traditions into modern traditions. There is the old joke that in America, everybody is Protestant, even the Catholics and Jews. Well, in modernity, everyone is a modernist, even Catholics and Jews — and Protestants, perhaps, were modern from the very beginning. What has happened is that modernity has co-opted all these traditions, and now that modernity is dissolving, we do not have any coherent traditions around, and that is a very big problem.

It is a big problem from MacIntyre's standpoint. From a left-wing postmodernist standpoint, it is just our situation. And here I want to make good this contrast between left-wing and right-wing postmodernism. Left-wing postmodernists, I will say, are the people who recognize this incoherence and say: well, that is just the way things are, and let us dance. There is a systematic incoherence in our ways of thinking, and that is how it goes. And that might help us undermine oppressive political structures. It might help us play with our intellectual heritage in the right sort of way. I do not want to say much more about left-wing postmodernism because there are so

many different varieties of it. Let me just summarize it by saying that left-wing postmodernism is at home in a certain kind of incoherence, whereas right-wing postmodernism — the postmodernism of MacIntyre as opposed to, say, the postmodernism of Derrida or Foucault — is looking for coherence, trying to find a coherence that can only be found in traditions. And therefore right-wing postmodernism can be called a kind of postmodern traditionalism, which fits MacIntyre's project very well.

The Is-Ought Problem and the Loss of Virtue

Let us now look at MacIntyre's analysis of the incoherence of modern moral reasoning. That analysis comes in MacIntyre's book *After Virtue*. It is not his first book, but it is the book in which he first made a big splash as a theorist of postmodernity. *After Virtue* is about what happens when the modern tradition of moral reasoning starts to become incoherent.

I want to lead you into this by way of a philosophical problem that was crucial to philosophical ethics until very recently. It is a project or problem of meta-ethics. Meta-ethics, in contrast to ethics, is not about what is good or what we ought to do, but rather about what the term "good" means and what the term "ought" means. Meta-ethics is the study of the concepts of ethics. Whereas an ethicist would think about whether abortion is right or wrong, a meta-ethicist would ask: what do you mean by "right" or "wrong"? And one of the big questions of meta-ethics is what you mean by "ought," and how "ought" is related to "is" — the famous is-ought gap. We know what it means to say things are this way or that way — that is how things are. But how do you get from that kind of premise to a conclusion about how things ought to be? Another way

to put this is: how do you get from facts to values? There seems to be a very large gap here.

Meta-ethics was in large part the attempt to figure out how to close that gap, and it seems to have become more or less an unsolvable problem. And that, for MacIntyre, is typical of modernity. Modern philosophy keeps hitting upon unsolvable problems because it has only fragments of coherent traditions to work with.

Think about how "ought" works in modern ethics. "Ought" means this is what I ought to do — not merely what I ought to do in order to get what I want, like: I ought to get in the car to drive to the grocery store. That is not the moral ought. What is the specifically moral ought? And how do I arrive at an understanding of what I ought to do in the moral sense? MacIntyre thinks that this sense does not exist as modernity conceives it, because it is just a survival from an earlier form of ethics. What we have in modern philosophy of ethics is a collection of obligations, oughts, or moral rules which once made sense in a larger context but have now been taken out of that context by modernity, which has shredded the earlier traditions from which they came. Modernity has only inherited incoherent fragments of coherent earlier traditions.

Modernity, in fact, wants morality to become autonomous — it wants a body of moral obligations or oughts that are not derived from any larger context, like, say, theology. It would be disastrous for a modern thinker to say that the word "ought" does not make sense except as part of a theological project. No, they want the world of "ought" to be a self-sealed universe, a collection of moral convictions that have their own grounding independent of theology and independent of legislation — they are just there.

And MacIntyre says: no, they cannot just be there. They are part of a larger whole. The larger whole in medieval Catholic thought, for

instance, included theology — a theology of legislation. The moral ought was what we ought to do in order to find our happiness in God, and God legislated the moral law so that by following these rules, we would come to happiness in him. In that larger medieval context, the ought made sense. But in modernity, the ought is floating free of this larger context and therefore makes no sense.

This was first noticed back in the 1950s by a Catholic philosopher named Elizabeth Anscombe, who wrote a famous article on modern moral philosophy complaining that it is incoherent — that you have this notion of "ought" floating free of the notion of theology and of divine legislation which once gave it sense. MacIntyre essentially picks up on that point from Elizabeth Anscombe and adds another.

One of the things that has dropped out of our thinking about ethics — this is a point that Anscombe briefly mentions and which MacIntyre makes a great deal of — is the notion of virtue. In modern moral philosophy, we are constantly focusing on actions: what we ought to do in this situation or that situation. Whereas for Aristotle, and for all of ancient and medieval ethics all the way up to Thomas Aquinas, the prime focus was not on what we ought to do in particular situations, though that was important. The prime focus was on who we ought to be — what kind of person we want to be. We want to be virtuous people. The focus was not on "ought" as the key category, but rather on virtue. The focus was therefore not on actions but on persons: not what is the right action to do, but rather what is the right kind of person to be, what is a virtuous person. That is a different focus, and it situates the notion of moral rules or obligations in a larger context that helps make sense of them, instead of leaving them in the incoherent modern isolation.

The incoherence of modern moral philosophy, according to MacIntyre, leads to moral skepticism, because our narrow focus on moral rules — isolated from the larger context which gives them

sense — makes them start to seem irrational, as if these moral oughts are really a matter of personal preference or personal commitment, as if we simply decide what is right and wrong. Because if the notion of a moral ought is floating free of all larger contexts, it really becomes nothing more than a matter of my relationship to this moral ought and my commitment to what I think is right and wrong. And for MacIntyre, that is simply the dissolution of any coherent ethics. But it is a typical phenomenon of modernity. Even Supreme Court justices have been known to think that way — in terms of everyone having a right to define what is right and wrong for themselves.

Another phenomenon of modern moral philosophy, according to MacIntyre, is that intelligence gets separated from morality, so that what matters is simply following the rules — or perhaps not following rules at all, but simply being a nice person. Being well-intentioned and loving and caring, so that morality ends up being emptied of all content. Just a vague sort of niceness. As opposed to an articulate understanding of what kind of things make for a good person — courage, temperance, justice, all those virtues that Aristotle and Plato talked about. Instead of a nuanced and complex understanding of what makes a good person, you have a vague sense that, well, if you are well-intentioned, then that is what really matters. But we can say a great deal more about the moral life than that.

Social Practices, Virtues, and Traditions

MacIntyre therefore tries to get us to think about the moral life in a more nuanced and concrete way, in terms of what he calls social practices. That is a technical term in *After Virtue*. Social practices are something like what Aristotle and Plato would have called arts. They

support both virtuous activity and practical intelligence in a very particular way.

Let me give you a couple of examples from MacIntyre himself. The skill of planting a turnip is not a social practice, but gardening is a social practice, and farming is a social practice. The skill of throwing a football well is not a social practice, but the game of football is a social practice. And what that means is that within the context of the social practice, there are virtues that allow you to do this well. Football includes certain kinds of courage. To play football well, you have to have a certain kind of physical courage. But you also need certain kinds of intelligence, certain kinds of practical smarts. When talking about Aristotle, I used the example of Michael Jordan playing basketball — a similar situation: do I pass or do I shoot? You have to have the practical smarts to know the answer. It takes a great deal of practice. It takes a lot of skill. It takes all kinds of virtues. The practical intelligence of being a good basketball player is connected with the virtues of being a good basketball player.

And they are all connected up with the notion of a good that is internal to the practice — the good of excellent play, the good of winning the game, all of which could not exist except internal to the practice of basketball. That is, if there were no such thing as basketball, there would be no such thing as winning the game of basketball or playing the game well. But there are also goods external to the practice, and that is the problem. Because one thing you can get by playing basketball well is not just winning the game, but a lot of money. And if you are playing the game for the sake of the money, that has a tendency to corrupt the practice.

MacIntyre is interested in how social practices allow for a kind of good that is impossible without them. Money is possible even without basketball. But Michael Jordan's magnificent basketball playing is not possible without the social practice of basketball. And

that is what we prize. Maybe some people go into basketball for the money. But what the rest of us gain from the game is something like the beauty of watching Michael Jordan play — and also the magnificent practical intelligence of a great basketball player like Michael Jordan.

Well then, for MacIntyre, moral reasoning, moral intelligence, and moral virtues are impossible without social practices. Something like the social practices of inquiry — of inquiring into what the good is — is what he has in mind. He is thinking of philosophy in particular as a social practice, which has goods internal to it: the goods of wisdom.

And these practices are sustained by traditions. Just as the game of basketball is impossible without the tradition of basketball — you have to teach it to new members of the community, introduce them to it, teach them how to play, pass on the traditions that make sense of what basketball is — so too the social practices that make possible certain kinds of internal goods are impossible without tradition. The tradition therefore supports the practical rationality that goes with these practices. MacIntyre is trying to suggest that a tradition of philosophical inquiry supports a practice of philosophizing in which you seek to understand what the good is for human life, and that ties back into Aristotle.

What ends up happening, then, is that tradition supports a kind of practical intelligence that becomes the basis for reflective moral reasoning. And within that context, MacIntyre believes, we can actually come to understand our moral lives, come to agree about things, and come to understand how we ought to live — in ways that are not fragmented and do not result in the pervasive, irresolvable disagreements that are characteristic of modernity.

What Is a Tradition? Rationality and the Choice Between Traditions

So now let us take a look at what MacIntyre means by tradition. We have talked about practice. A practice is a rather small thing compared to a tradition. A practice might be something like basketball. A tradition is a larger thing. A tradition includes a worldview or a conceptual scheme as its intellectual side, but it also includes a history. That is one of the things that tradition adds to the notion of a practice. A tradition is a history through time, and it has a bearer. A tradition is rooted in a community. A tradition is not just an idea floating in the air. It is rooted in what a community does as it orders its life in order to pursue the goods of that community.

Traditions are therefore rather similar to what Thomas Kuhn calls scientific paradigms. Scientific paradigms contain these elements of worldviews and theories, but they are also rooted in specific practices. For Kuhn, scientific paradigms involve not just theories but certain social practices. How do you go about conducting an experiment? If you are a young scientist and a graduate student in a university, you will learn how to design an experiment in a lab, what the equipment means, how to use it. There are certain practical skills that go into a scientific paradigm. The paradigm is both theoretical and practical in that way, and it shapes you. It shapes who you are, how you think, and what kind of scientist you are. So likewise, traditions shape the way you think, they shape who you are, they shape what kind of person you are, and they teach you to do certain things in certain ways. And that becomes the basis for practical reasoning and thus for moral reasoning.

MacIntyre will also be interested in another philosopher of science, Imre Lakatos, who is a critic of Kuhn. Kuhn tends to think that scientific paradigms are so incommensurable that there is no rational

way of choosing between them. In a crisis where you do not know whether Newtonian physics or Einsteinian physics is true, Kuhn will talk as if there is no rational way of deciding between them — as if there is a kind of irrational conversion in which individuals simply convert from being a Newtonian physicist to being an Einsteinian physicist. Lakatos says: no, it is not like that. You can actually tell when a paradigm is working and when it is not. He calls them not paradigms but research programs. And he says some research programs — like Newtonian physics at the beginning of the twentieth century — are degenerating. They are no longer able to solve their own problems. Whereas other research programs are progressive. They are getting somewhere. They are solving their problems. Every research program turns up new problems in science.

MacIntyre will say that every tradition is like this too. Every tradition of inquiry turns up new problems to solve. This is a healthy aspect of traditions, both in science and in life in general. But a degenerating research program or a degenerating tradition cannot solve its own problems and thus falls into a kind of epistemological crisis.

This gives MacIntyre a way of talking about how traditions might be rational, in contrast to the relativist view of traditions. The relativist view is that everything that is true or rational is true or rational only relative to a particular worldview or tradition. So if you are from a tribe in New Guinea, what is true for you is not the same as what is true for the Western anthropologists who come to visit you. You have your own coherent worldview, and within that context you have certain truths that Westerners do not understand, just as Westerners have certain truths that the tribesmen in New Guinea do not understand. This form of relativism was devised mainly by anthropologists and is called cultural relativism. The idea is: what is true for them is not true for us, and what is true for us is not true for them. We are not really disagreeing about anything, and we cannot

say that we are better than they are. MacIntyre is extremely unhappy with this view. It means, for instance, that you cannot really say a Nazi is wrong. It is true for him that the Third Reich should go and eliminate all the Jews. How can you say that they are wrong if it is true for them? That is totally unsatisfactory as a way of dealing with moral reasoning.

But the other side of it is that there is a certain worthy motive behind relativism. Relativists want to be able to respect the views of the other, like the tribesmen in New Guinea. There are, after all, traditions of thought that are worthy of respect, other than our own. And how do we respect the fact that the tribesmen in New Guinea is not a fool? The tribesmen in New Guinea can live in the jungle better than any of us can. How do you respect the integrity and intelligence of their worldview while also recognizing that they simply do not believe the same things that we do?

MacIntyre thinks that this worthy motive of relativism — respect for the worldview of the other — comes at too high a price, because what is really at issue is whether these traditions can find the truth. And there are all sorts of truths that the tribesmen in New Guinea cannot quite grasp — all the truths that Western philosophy or Western culture is better at explaining than the worldview of the tribesmen in New Guinea. (I should note that this example of the tribesmen in New Guinea is my own example, not MacIntyre's. His own examples are more complicated.)

What MacIntyre is suggesting is something like this. When the tribesmen in New Guinea encounters Western culture, there are certain things that either side cannot understand very well. We Westerners do not understand how to live in the jungle as well as the tribesmen in New Guinea does. But the tribesmen in New Guinea does not understand our technology. Now suppose they start arguing with each other, trying to figure out who understands things

better. What ends up happening, MacIntyre thinks, is that we Westerners can explain why the tribesman's worldview makes sense and is successful on its own terms. Once we have learned their tradition well enough — and the first stage is actually to understand their tradition and learn it — we can explain why their tradition equips them to be successful in their mode of life. Whereas when the tribesmen in New Guinea tries to understand the West, he cannot explain in his own terms why our worldview is successful. We can explain in our terms why his worldview works, but his worldview cannot explain why ours works. So our worldview explains more than his does. And not only that, but we can explain in Western terms why his worldview fails to explain the things it fails to explain. Whereas his worldview cannot explain why our worldview can give an adequate account of his worldview.

The point is that, in general, the Western worldview explains more. And once the two sides come to understand each other and learn each other's language, as it were, the tribesmen in New Guinea can recognize that the Western worldview explains more — it explains the successes and failures of his own viewpoint better than his own viewpoint can. And that shows that the modern Western scientific worldview is to that extent more rational than the tribesmen in New Guinea's worldview. It does not mean his worldview is totally irrational. It just means that he has something to learn from this other tradition.

Notice that the Western tradition can also learn from the tribesmen in New Guinea, especially about how to survive in the jungle. But the Western tradition can more successfully incorporate the knowledge of the tribesmen in New Guinea than the tribesmen in New Guinea can incorporate the Western view. If the tribesmen in New Guinea want to incorporate Western knowledge, they have to start thinking like Westerners.

And so the key point here is that there is no standpoint to judge between two traditions that is neutral and independent of those two traditions. That is the holistic insight that Kuhn had about scientific paradigms: there is no neutral standpoint from which to judge between Newtonian physics and Einsteinian physics. Likewise, there is no neutral standpoint to judge between modern Western thinking and the worldview of the tribesmen in New Guinea. But that does not mean that the judgment is simply a matter of personal preference. There is a rational way of determining which tradition really works better. The choice between traditions is not like Tevye's choice — tradition, tradition, we just do it that way. No. You can find out that your tradition actually works, or you can find out that your tradition does not work as well as another one, and that you should therefore learn from that other tradition. And that means that traditions are not inherently irrational. They can be the source and context for rationality, the source and context for self-critical thinking. They can solve new problems, and they can be a context in which one can learn new things by solving those new problems — in the ancient spirit of Socrates.

Lecture 84: Nozick's Defense of Libertarianism

Professor Jeremy Shermer

In this lecture I am going to be dealing with Robert Nozick, who was born in 1938. I will be focusing very much on his book *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*. Let me explain what the structure of the lecture will be. I am going to start with some preliminaries about Nozick's work and a little about Nozick himself. I will then move to look at the starting point of his argument in the book. I will then turn to the arguments he presents for the legitimacy of a minimal state — one which is something like a state, but very much limited in terms of the functions it undertakes. I will then turn to some of the challenges he offers to those who want a larger state and the involuntary redistribution of wealth, for example through taxation. I will then look at some of the critical reception of his work and at some changes in his views since *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* was published. Finally, I will conclude by looking at the final — and in my view unduly neglected — section of his book.

Preliminaries

In this lecture I am going to focus on *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* itself rather than on Nozick as a person. I do this really because Nozick is a contemporary philosopher much of whose other work deals with a variety of different, often technical, problems within philosophy. There is a sense in which Nozick is, in a way, personally disconnected from his most famous work, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, in a manner that is not true of many of the other thinkers dealt with in this series. Nozick has, in a sense, distanced himself from the book. He has not responded to criticisms that others have made of it, and he has

changed his views somewhat. In his particular case, I think we gain less knowledge about the work by knowing other things about Nozick and his career than may be true with other authors.

The Starting Point: Individuals with Rights

What happens if we take seriously the idea that individuals have rights? Robert Nozick starts *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* by saying, and I quote: "Individuals have rights, and there are things no person or group can do to them without violating those rights." But what follows from this depends very much on what kind of view you hold about what those rights are. Nozick understands them very much in the tradition of, say, John Locke or Thomas Jefferson, rather than in terms of modern notions of entitlements to welfare as an interpretation of rights.

In his book, Nozick starts from a situation in which there are individuals with rights to their persons and rights to acquire property, but there is no government. He starts with a so-called state of nature, very much in the tradition of John Locke. Nozick argues that from this starting point a government limited in the scope of what it does — a so-called night-watchman state, something like a night watchman who goes around protecting persons and their property — can be set up legitimately without infringing on anyone's rights. But he claims that anything going beyond that, including in particular the involuntary redistribution of property, would be illegitimate.

Nozick's book created quite a stir. It was pretty unpopular within the academic world — these are not the kind of views that most professors tend to hold. A few of them do hold such views and were very happy about it, but for the most part the book was unpopular in academia. The work, though, developed its themes with brilliance,

with a great deal of technical argument, and with some neat examples, and so it was intriguing and provoked a great deal of discussion. Above all it created a stir because the author was a professor of philosophy at Harvard, who had previously built a strong reputation for doing different pieces of careful technical work within philosophy.

This leads me to a certain problem in talking about the work, namely that much of the argument in the book is detailed, technical, and rather clever in an abstract sense. This clearly is not material that it makes much sense for me to try to second-guess in a relatively brief lecture. So what I am going to do in what follows is to offer you a big-picture account of what Nozick was up to.

Nozick's Engagement with Libertarianism and Individualist Anarchism

In the introduction to the book, Nozick actually tells us that his initial concern was to try to *refute* libertarian ideas. He had obviously got into discussion with some libertarians, he did not much like their views, and he set out initially because he wanted to refute them. He also talks of a discussion he had with the individualist anarchist thinker, the American Murray Rothbard, a well-known defender of libertarian views. Rothbard thought that individual rights and markets are basically all that you need, and that you do not actually need a state at all. It was these kinds of views with which Nozick was engaging when he set out on this task.

As things turned out, Nozick does in the end pose some problems for libertarians, and he is critical of individualist anarchism of the sort that Rothbard espouses. But the overall thrust of the book in the end is really very sympathetic to libertarian views. Nozick's has indeed been a very powerful voice for a libertarian perspective. It seemed to

give legitimacy to it by virtue of the character of his arguments, and also, as I have mentioned, because of Nozick's own standing. I had a personal friend who was sympathetic to that sort of perspective and was in academia, who told me that until Nozick's book came out, he really could not openly admit to the kind of views he held, because his colleagues would object. But after Nozick's book came out, he could say, yes, I hold that sort of view — and so it legitimated that kind of perspective within academia.

One other thing worth noting is that Nozick's argument is very much based on an appeal to rights, rather than on arguments about the consequences of a free market system of the kind one finds, for example, in the work of Friedrich Hayek.

From the State of Nature to the Minimal State

Nozick starts from individuals in a so-called state of nature — a situation without government — with rights to their persons and rights to acquire property. This is historically familiar because it is very reminiscent of what one finds in John Locke, although there are some important differences between the two. Locke himself, in his *First Treatise of Government*, says that people have a right to charity from the surplus of others, and this kind of notion really does not make it into Nozick. Furthermore, in Locke there has been some controversy about how one is to understand his ideas about rights, but they pretty clearly seem, at least to me, to go back to theological ideas — duties that we have to God. The basis of rights in Nozick is really left unexplained. He certainly does not appeal to theological ideas.

Nozick himself is also critical of some of Locke's ideas about how people can initially acquire property rights. Locke gave an account of people mixing their labor with unoccupied land and thereby making

it theirs. Nozick raises some problems about this. He says it is not at all obvious that if you mix something that is yours with something that is not, the latter then becomes yours. He gives a neat example: take a can of soup and take a lake that has hitherto been undiscovered. You open the can of soup, you swish it around in the lake, and if it is tomato soup, you get the soup gradually spreading out into the lake, getting thinner and thinner until it all disappears. Nozick says it is not at all obvious that by mixing something of yours with something that is not yours, the latter thereby becomes yours. People would normally say you have simply lost your soup.

He raises lots of tricky points like this without always providing answers to them. I do not think this necessarily poses a pressing problem for his own work — anyone is entitled to have an open agenda. I think, though, that things get a little more difficult when, as Nozick does, he appeals to some of these notions — for example, ideas about individual property ownership — and uses them as a stick to beat other people with. If you want to use a notion not merely for filling out your own ideas but as a stick with which to beat others, then that stick really has to be pretty well put together. And I think this is a genuine weakness in Nozick.

What then happens in terms of his reasoning about people moving from a state of nature into a limited government? The idea of a state of nature has been used historically to reflect on government and its proper relation to citizens. It occurs in a number of different thinkers — Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and various contemporary thinkers. The most useful specific parallel with Nozick's approach is what one finds in Locke. There, individual rights in a state of nature serve as the basis for the powers of government. If you want to check whether what government is doing is legitimate, you have to trace back the powers it is exercising to powers that individuals had in a state of nature, which they can be envisaged as having given to

government. It also serves as a source of limitations on the power of government.

Now, some people — individualist anarchists, for example Murray Rothbard — would argue that if we started in a Lockean state of nature, we should simply have stayed there and never set up a state. One can compare this to Locke's own response to Robert Filmer, a defender of royal absolutism. In the *Second Treatise of Government*, Locke says of Filmer that he avoids what mischiefs may be done by foxes, but is content — nay, thinks it safety — to be devoured by lions. The message is that although there are problems in the state of nature, the kind of absolute state that Filmer endorses is far more dangerous than those problems. But essentially what Rothbard and other individualist anarchists do is to turn this same argument against Locke himself: they say that it is the state, as a concentration of power, which is really dangerous. There may indeed be some problems without a state, but they are nothing like as serious as the problems you will have if you set one up.

How could one possibly remain in a situation without government? Locke himself admits that there can be property and commercial activity within a state of nature, but he argues that you need government because there can be disputes about property rights and so on which lead to endless quarrels and eventually to war. You cannot have anyone in a state of nature capable of giving impartial judgment and enforcing it. The individualist anarchist responds that there are suggestions about how you could solve these problems within a state of nature: you could have private adjudicators, private enforcement agencies. Some individualist anarchists have spent a long time spelling out how such arrangements might work and offering historical parallels.

Nozick wants to take on the individualist anarchist by saying: I share your starting point — individuals with rights in a state of nature —

but I want to show how you could get from this to a minimal state without coercion and without assuming that everyone comes together to make some grand agreement. A state can come about almost spontaneously — as Adam Smith would have put it, by an invisible hand — as the unintended consequence of actions that people have taken. How? Nozick offers a rather clever argument. He says, first of all, in agreement with the individualist anarchist, that if people were in a state of nature with problems about judgment and enforcement, one would expect private protection agencies of various kinds to be set up. People would hire others to offer adjudication and enforcement of judgments. Nozick then argues that one could expect these agencies to lead to a monopoly, or at least cooperation, in any one particular geographical area. If different enforcement agencies operated in the same space under different rules, you would have a terrible problem — imagine the police having to determine, when someone yells "stop thief," under which law the person was acting and whether they could enforce it. Instead, what you would get is something more like the relationship between banks, which provide pretty much the same services and typically allow each other's customers to use their ATM machines in exchange for a fee. So in any one geographical area, you would get a good deal of uniformity.

You might say this already starts to look rather like the key functions of government, only provided privately. But then there is the question of those people who do not want to join. Jonathan Wolff, who has written about Nozick, refers to these as "John Wayne types" who say, I will look after myself, I do not need a protection agency. The difficulty is that one seems to need an argument as to how these people can be compelled to come into the fold. Nozick offers an argument to the effect that it is legitimate to compel them to do so, along the lines that other people have a right to some sort of settled and public procedure when there are disputes, and the private justice

imposed by John Wayne types imposes a potential danger on others. What people are entitled to is regularity in how these matters work. These independents who want to enforce the law themselves are just wild cards. Nozick argues that it is not an infringement of their rights to compel them not to be independents and to force them to join a dominant protection agency, provided that you compensate them by extending protection services to them. By this means, Nozick also addresses the fact that in any geographical area, a state extends its protection to everyone — the police do not ask, before helping you, whether you are signed up and paying taxes. They extend those services to everybody. Nozick wants to argue that on this kind of basis, this arrangement would be in order and would not infringe anyone's rights.

The argument is interesting and really clever, but you might say it is really only of interest to people like Murray Rothbard who are individualist anarchists. Indeed, it has largely been the individualist anarchists who have taken issue with this particular line of argument in Nozick's work. They have not found it that convincing. They say: why are you assuming it is the independents or mavericks who are the problem? And they produce various examples of the failures of states to deliver justice and fair procedure. I will turn from this, however, since it becomes a somewhat arcane controversy, to the issues raised by Nozick's next line of argument.

Against the Redistributionist State

What Nozick wants to say is that while the setting up of a minimal state is acceptable, anything that goes beyond a minimal state in terms of the exercise of state power is morally illegitimate — it involves infringing people's rights. In this respect, he is taking on the kinds of policies we are familiar with in ordinary government. Rather

than addressing Nozick's work in a completely systematic way, I am going to discuss four of the arguments he offers, and say something in more general terms about his ideas about justice.

First, Nozick offers a criticism of what one might call the democratic legitimation of redistribution. He does this by way of something he calls the tale of the slave. Nozick asks us to consider a situation in which someone is a slave with a brutal master, and their life is genuinely not their own. He then asks us to consider gradual transitions from that situation: perhaps to a situation where the master says, okay, all the slaves will have a vote as to what tasks different people will perform, and you receive your orders from that collective decision. He moves up by stages to a situation where essentially what you have are collective decisions being taken by the whole group. You have a vote in these decisions, but you must do whatever the outcome of the vote dictates. This slow gradation arrives at what is in effect a depiction of democracy. And what Nozick says is that at the final stage, in a situation where the votes are otherwise tied, your vote may be crucial and may then decide what you will be required to do or how much tax you will pay. Nozick asks: at what point in this story, moving by slow gradations, do people become free? What he is suggesting is that in a democratic system like ours, our own vote is seldom — indeed in the experience of any of us, never — going to be crucial in deciding an outcome. A situation in which you are truly free is one in which your rights are protected and you are entitled to your own property. There is something decidedly unfree about the ordinary notion of democracy, where what you do and how you are taxed is simply up to collective decision-making, in which you have a tiny say that normally does not count one way or the other.

The second line of argument concerns self-ownership and offers a critique of taxation. What Nozick really says here is that if we are

taxed, you do not, in a sense, fully own yourself. He says taxation is, in a way, a little on a par with forced labor — for a certain portion of what you are doing, you are not doing it for yourself, you are doing it for someone else. It is as if other people collectively owned you for part of the time. Nozick wants to problematize and ask us to question something we normally just take for granted. It should be said that Nozick is perfectly happy with voluntary charitable giving — indeed, he would strongly recommend and favor it. It is coercion — the coerced taking of your resources and the diverting of them into various other plans and concerns — that he is critical of.

The third line of argument uses an example involving Wilt Chamberlain, a famous player of an American sport. Wilt Chamberlain became wealthy because people wanted to pay to watch him play. His wealth, in such cases, would be the product of all kinds of voluntary transactions. When he was famous and transferred to another club, the club could raise their prices because people were happy to pay a little more to see him play. And what Nozick really wants to say is that the key question to ask is: were the transactions voluntary? If the result is that someone is extremely well off, what one has to ask is whether he got there by fair means, whether people agreed to it, whether people voluntarily chose it. And that, in Nozick's view, is the end of the story. Preventing such voluntary transactions between adults means infringing their liberty and violating their rights. He also wants to say that if, by contrast, you insist that the government must pursue equality, it would constantly have to interfere in all sorts of voluntary transactions between individuals. If you started from a position where everyone was equal, voluntary transactions would immediately begin to generate inequalities, and if you insist on equality, the government has to keep coming in and interfering.

Finally, in this area, Nozick offers a critique of the philosopher John Rawls and some of his arguments for disregarding how it is that things come to be owned. Rawls suggests that we should discuss issues about constitutional principles and the distribution of resources from behind a veil of ignorance — a situation where we imagine that we do not know what position we would hold in a particular society, and we consider what would be just or fair without knowing what position we would end up in. Nozick wants to say there is a problem with this, because it ends up dissociating individuals from the particular positions they hold, and in particular from the production of wealth. It treats wealth as if it were manna coming down from heaven, rather than something actually produced by particular individuals to whom it is tied — and those ties, Nozick wants to say, really mean that wealth is not simply free for us to redistribute as we might see fit.

Justice as Entitlement

Behind all of this lies Nozick's view about justice. The key issue for him is notions of entitlement rather than patterns such as equality. If there is a question about the legitimacy of someone's holdings or wealth, one must ask: was this possession justly acquired by that individual, or legitimately acquired from someone who themselves acquired it justly? If it was not justly acquired, there may be a historically based case for compensation — for example, for people who were dispossessed. This is an interesting approach, but it suggests that there are no problems about wealth provided that the path to acquisition was acceptable.

Is this acceptable? What about huge inequalities? What about great amounts of wealth that people hold simply because they inherited money from others? Is that acceptable? Do people simply have a

right to dispose of their property as they choose? Nozick, I think, would say yes — they have rights to this. Others might say there is a problem with it, a difficulty with it. Nozick's approach does have its weaknesses. As I mentioned before, he does not really offer an explanation of how people could justly acquire things in the first place. Although this does not mean that his argument collapses, Nozick's notions about self-ownership, the Wilt Chamberlain example, and the tale of the slave are provocative, and I think the argument about entitlements is also forceful, provided that people will grant that there are notions about just entitlements.

Before finishing this part of the discussion, I would like to make three other brief points about his work. Nozick wants to stress that individuals have rights as constraints on what other people can do — he describes these as side constraints. You simply must not infringe on other people's rights. He argues for a respecting of each individual's rights rather than some notion of maximizing how many rights everyone can enjoy overall, which he calls a utilitarianism of rights. He insists that rights must not be infringed. You may ask: never infringed? What about a situation where something really dire would happen if a right were not infringed? Say there is some disaster and to get help you have to use a telephone, but to reach it you must cross a farmer's field. The farmer says: that is mine, you do not have the right to do that. Nozick says that if there is a real disaster at stake, then all right, the right can be infringed, but only in those cases.

Critical Reception and Later Developments

What are we to make of Nozick? I would stress first of all that he offers stimulating and very clever argument. He poses lots of problems for welfare liberals on the basis of how liberty and

individual rights are widely understood in America. The key weakness of his work, I think, is that rather too much depends on undefended assumptions. He has himself, in a later book, *The Examined Life*, indicated that he now has some reservations about the earlier work, but he has not indicated in much detail what they are. He says that issues about public celebration of identity are important and need to be brought in as qualifications, but he has not really engaged with his academic critics.

The Utopia Section

There is, however, a final section of his book on utopia which seems to me really very interesting and which I regard as unduly neglected. In it, Nozick discusses the notion of a minimal state and private property rights as offering a framework within which people can live diverse lives. Just think of the diversity of different people there are, the different ideals they may hold, the different notions they might have as to what a good life consists of. And what Nozick says is: why not allow people to separate, to pursue these different ideals with like-minded people, rather than committing everyone to doing everything together? He also says that if you allow for this, we can learn from other people's mistakes — we can see these as trials of different ways of doing things, as different experiments in living. Provided, that is, that other people allow us the freedom to do these things.

What we have done in this lecture is to start with some preliminaries about Nozick's work, look at the starting point of his argument, explore briefly his arguments for the legitimacy of a minimal state, look at his challenges to a notion of a state going beyond that, examine some of the critical reception of his work, and finally

consider the utopia section of his book, which I believe deserves far more attention than it has received.

Coda to Part VII: The Crises of Modernity

Every great intellectual tradition eventually reaches a moment when it becomes self-conscious. It turns away from the world long enough to examine itself. It asks not only whether its answers are correct, but whether its questions have been well framed. It wonders whether its assumptions remain defensible. It subjects its own foundations to the same scrutiny it once directed toward inherited authorities. Part VII has been the story of such a moment.

The thinkers gathered in this final section are extraordinarily diverse. They disagree about politics, morality, religion, economics, science, language, and the very purpose of philosophy itself. Hayek and Rawls stand on opposite sides of fundamental political debates. Popper and Kuhn offer competing visions of scientific rationality. Derrida and Habermas disagree about the prospects for communication and reason. Rorty abandons philosophical foundations while MacIntyre seeks their recovery. Gouldner critiques ideology while Nozick challenges the legitimacy of redistribution. Yet despite their differences, all are responding to a common predicament.

The modern world has become too successful to remain intellectually innocent.

The project that began centuries earlier with the scientific revolution and reached maturity during the Enlightenment achieved many of its ambitions. Scientific knowledge expanded beyond anything earlier generations could have imagined. Constitutional government spread across large portions of the globe. Individual rights became central political ideals. Economic productivity increased dramatically. Education became more widely available. Human beings acquired unprecedented power over nature.

And yet these achievements produced consequences that the architects of modernity rarely anticipated.

Scientific rationality generated life-saving medicine and nuclear weapons. Industrial capitalism created prosperity and alienation. Bureaucratic administration increased efficiency while threatening individual autonomy. Mass communication expanded access to information while creating new opportunities for manipulation. Democratic societies promoted liberty while struggling with polarization, inequality, and cultural fragmentation. The twentieth century demonstrated that progress and catastrophe could emerge from the same historical processes.

This realization transformed philosophy.

The question was no longer whether modernity had succeeded or failed. The reality was more complicated. Modernity had succeeded in many of its objectives while simultaneously generating new forms of uncertainty. The confidence that characterized earlier centuries became increasingly difficult to sustain. Yet the alternative was equally problematic. To reject modernity entirely would require abandoning many of the institutions, practices, and values that had expanded human freedom and knowledge.

The thinkers of Part VII therefore occupy a distinctive position. They are neither simple defenders nor simple critics of the modern project. They are participants in an argument about how modernity should understand itself.

Some sought to preserve the Enlightenment through revision and reform. Rawls attempted to reconstruct a rational foundation for justice in pluralistic societies. Habermas defended the possibility of democratic legitimacy grounded in communication rather than authority. Popper argued that fallibilism, criticism, and openness remain the best safeguards against both dogmatism and tyranny.

Others emphasized the limitations of Enlightenment assumptions. Hayek warned that centralized knowledge is impossible and that attempts to engineer society often produce unintended consequences. Kuhn demonstrated that scientific progress is more historically contingent and socially embedded than many had assumed. Quine challenged traditional distinctions that had structured modern epistemology.

Still others pushed the critique further. Derrida exposed the instability of conceptual structures that claim permanence. Rorty suggested that philosophy should abandon the search for foundations altogether. Gouldner applied ideological criticism to the critics themselves. MacIntyre argued that modernity's deepest problem lies in its inability to recognize its own dependence upon traditions of reasoning and moral formation.

What emerges from these debates is not a final resolution. It is something more valuable.

Intellectual maturity.

The Western intellectual tradition began with the confidence that reason could investigate reality. It continued through religious syntheses that united faith and philosophy. It developed scientific methods capable of transforming civilization. It produced political theories, moral systems, economic models, and historical narratives of extraordinary sophistication. Along the way, it repeatedly encountered its own limits. Each generation discovered problems that earlier generations had overlooked.

Yet this is not evidence of failure.

It is evidence of vitality.

A tradition remains alive precisely because it continues to question itself. The philosophers who have appeared throughout this course are connected less by agreement than by participation in a common

conversation. The Pre-Socratics asked what the world is made of. Plato asked what is ultimately real. Aristotle asked how human beings flourish. Augustine asked why the heart remains restless. Aquinas asked how faith and reason might coexist. Descartes asked what can be known with certainty. Hume asked whether certainty is possible at all. Kant asked what reason can legitimately accomplish. Nietzsche asked what happens when inherited values lose their authority. The thinkers of Part VII ask how a civilization should proceed once it becomes aware of the contingency and limitations of its own foundations.

No final answer has emerged.

Nor should we expect one.

The history of philosophy is not a march toward unanimous agreement. It is an ongoing effort to deepen understanding. Every solution reveals new questions. Every achievement creates new challenges. Every generation inherits problems from its predecessors and leaves unfinished work for those who follow.

This is why the Western intellectual tradition remains compelling after more than two and a half millennia. It is not a museum of settled doctrines. It is a living conversation. The participants change. The vocabulary evolves. New discoveries alter the terrain. Historical circumstances introduce new concerns. Yet the fundamental aspiration endures: to understand ourselves, our world, and our place within it with as much honesty, rigor, and wisdom as possible.

The course now comes to an end, but the conversation does not.

Indeed, the most important lesson of these eighty-four lectures may be that philosophy is never truly finished. Every age inherits questions it did not create. Every generation must decide which answers remain persuasive and which require reconsideration. The responsibility cannot be delegated. It belongs to each of us.

From the shores of Ionia to the crises of modernity, the thinkers we have encountered have left behind no final system, no universally accepted doctrine, and no permanent resolution of humanity's deepest concerns. What they have left is something far more enduring: an example of what it means to take ideas seriously, to question courageously, to reason carefully, and to remain open to the possibility that wisdom begins where certainty ends.

That inheritance now passes to us.

Epilogue

Every civilization tells stories about itself.

Some tell stories of divine election. Others tell stories of military conquest, national destiny, economic progress, or cultural superiority. The Western intellectual tradition has told many such stories over the centuries. Yet beneath all of them lies a deeper narrative, one less concerned with power than with inquiry. It is the story of a civilization that repeatedly subjected its own assumptions to criticism, that transformed doubt into a method, and that turned questioning itself into one of its highest cultural virtues.

This course has followed that story across more than twenty-five centuries.

We began among the Greeks, where a handful of thinkers living on the fringes of the ancient world dared to ask whether nature could be understood without recourse to mythology. Their answers were often mistaken. Their methods were primitive by modern standards. Yet something revolutionary occurred when Thales, Anaximander, Heraclitus, Parmenides, and their successors shifted attention from divine narratives to rational explanation. A door opened. Once opened, it could never entirely be closed.

From that moment onward, the Western tradition became a vast conversation about reality, truth, justice, knowledge, and the good life.

The conversation did not proceed in a straight line. Plato and Aristotle disagreed profoundly about the nature of reality. The Stoics and Epicureans offered competing visions of human flourishing. Skeptics challenged every claim to certainty. The biblical tradition introduced a conception of history, revelation, and divine purpose unlike anything found in classical philosophy. Christianity

transformed the intellectual landscape by bringing Athens and Jerusalem into a creative and often uneasy partnership. Medieval thinkers sought to reconcile reason and faith, while mystics explored dimensions of human experience that lay beyond conceptual analysis.

The Renaissance and the scientific revolution altered the balance once again. Human beings discovered not only new continents but new methods of understanding. Bacon, Galileo, Descartes, Newton, and countless others expanded the horizon of what seemed possible. The Enlightenment elevated reason into a cultural ideal and placed extraordinary confidence in humanity's capacity for self-improvement.

Then came the great modern disillusionments.

The nineteenth century witnessed revolutions, ideologies, industrialization, and unprecedented social transformation. The twentieth century endured world wars, totalitarian regimes, genocide, nuclear weapons, and the collapse of many inherited certainties. Thinkers responded by examining language, consciousness, power, tradition, economics, science, and culture with increasing sophistication and increasing skepticism.

By the time we arrive at the third decade of the third millennium, we find ourselves inheritors of all these developments simultaneously.

This is both our privilege and our burden.

No previous generation possessed access to so much accumulated knowledge. Never before have human beings understood so much about the physical universe. We have mapped the human genome, walked on the Moon, explored distant planets, harnessed the power of the atom, connected billions of people through digital networks, and created machines capable of processing information at astonishing speeds. Scientific and technological progress has

transformed daily life more dramatically than even the most optimistic Enlightenment thinker could have imagined.

Yet knowledge has not eliminated uncertainty.

Indeed, in some respects, it has multiplied it.

The modern world is characterized by a curious paradox. We know more than any civilization in history, yet many people feel less certain about meaning, identity, morality, and purpose than their ancestors did. We possess extraordinary technological power, yet often struggle to agree on how that power should be used. We inhabit societies that celebrate freedom, yet we frequently find ourselves overwhelmed by complexity. We have unprecedented access to information, yet misinformation and confusion flourish alongside knowledge.

The questions that animated earlier centuries have not disappeared. They have merely returned in new forms.

What is truth in an age of algorithms?

What is freedom in a world shaped by vast technological systems?

What is human dignity in an era of artificial intelligence, biotechnology, and data-driven governance?

What becomes of community when social life increasingly unfolds through digital mediation?

Can democratic institutions survive growing polarization and distrust?

Can civilizations maintain moral confidence without shared metaphysical foundations?

These are not entirely new questions. They are descendants of questions asked by Socrates, Augustine, Aquinas, Descartes, Hume, Kant, Nietzsche, and countless others. The vocabulary has changed.

The circumstances have changed. The underlying concerns remain remarkably familiar.

Perhaps this continuity reveals something important.

The Western intellectual tradition is often criticized for its failures, and not without reason. It has been associated with imperialism, exclusion, dogmatism, ideological excess, and cultural arrogance. Like every human tradition, it bears the marks of the societies that produced it. Yet reducing it to those failures misses its most distinctive characteristic.

Its greatest achievement may not be any particular doctrine.

It may be its capacity for self-correction.

Again and again, the tradition generated critics of its own assumptions. Socrates challenged Athens. Augustine challenged Rome. Luther challenged the Church. Hume challenged rationalism. Marx challenged liberal capitalism. Nietzsche challenged morality itself. The twentieth century challenged nearly everything. Time after time, ideas once considered settled became objects of scrutiny.

This process has often been painful. It has sometimes produced fragmentation and uncertainty. Yet it has also preserved intellectual vitality. A civilization remains alive when it can question itself without losing the capacity to continue the conversation.

That conversation now extends beyond the geographical and cultural boundaries that once defined it. The twenty-first century is increasingly characterized by encounters among civilizations, traditions, and perspectives. The Western intellectual tradition no longer speaks from an uncontested center. It participates in a global dialogue involving Asian, African, Islamic, Indigenous, and countless other intellectual inheritances. This development does not diminish the importance of Western thought. On the contrary, it places it

within a broader human context where its strengths and limitations become more visible.

Perhaps that is exactly where it belongs.

For all its achievements, the tradition has never been at its best when claiming final authority. It has been at its best when asking questions, welcoming criticism, and remaining open to revision. Its finest moments emerge not from certainty but from intellectual courage.

And that, ultimately, may be the most enduring lesson of this course.

The thinkers we have encountered did not agree with one another. Many would have regarded one another's conclusions as deeply mistaken. Yet they shared a conviction that human beings are capable of seeking understanding, that ideas matter, and that thoughtful reflection remains one of the noblest activities available to us.

As the third decade of the third millennium unfolds, we face challenges that would have astonished every previous generation. Artificial intelligence, climate change, biotechnology, demographic transformation, geopolitical instability, and cultural fragmentation are reshaping the world before our eyes. We cannot know with confidence what the coming century will bring.

Neither could our predecessors know what their future held.

What they left us is not a set of final answers.

They left us habits of mind.

The willingness to question.

The discipline to reason.

The humility to recognize error.

The courage to revise assumptions.

The wisdom to distinguish certainty from dogmatism.

And the hope that understanding, however incomplete, remains worth pursuing.

The Western intellectual tradition is not a monument. It is not a creed. It is not a finished system.

It is an invitation.

An invitation to join a conversation that began long before us, that will continue long after us, and that remains one of humanity's greatest collective efforts to understand what it means to be human in a universe that is at once intelligible, mysterious, beautiful, and unfinished.

The conversation continues.

Its next chapter has yet to be written.